

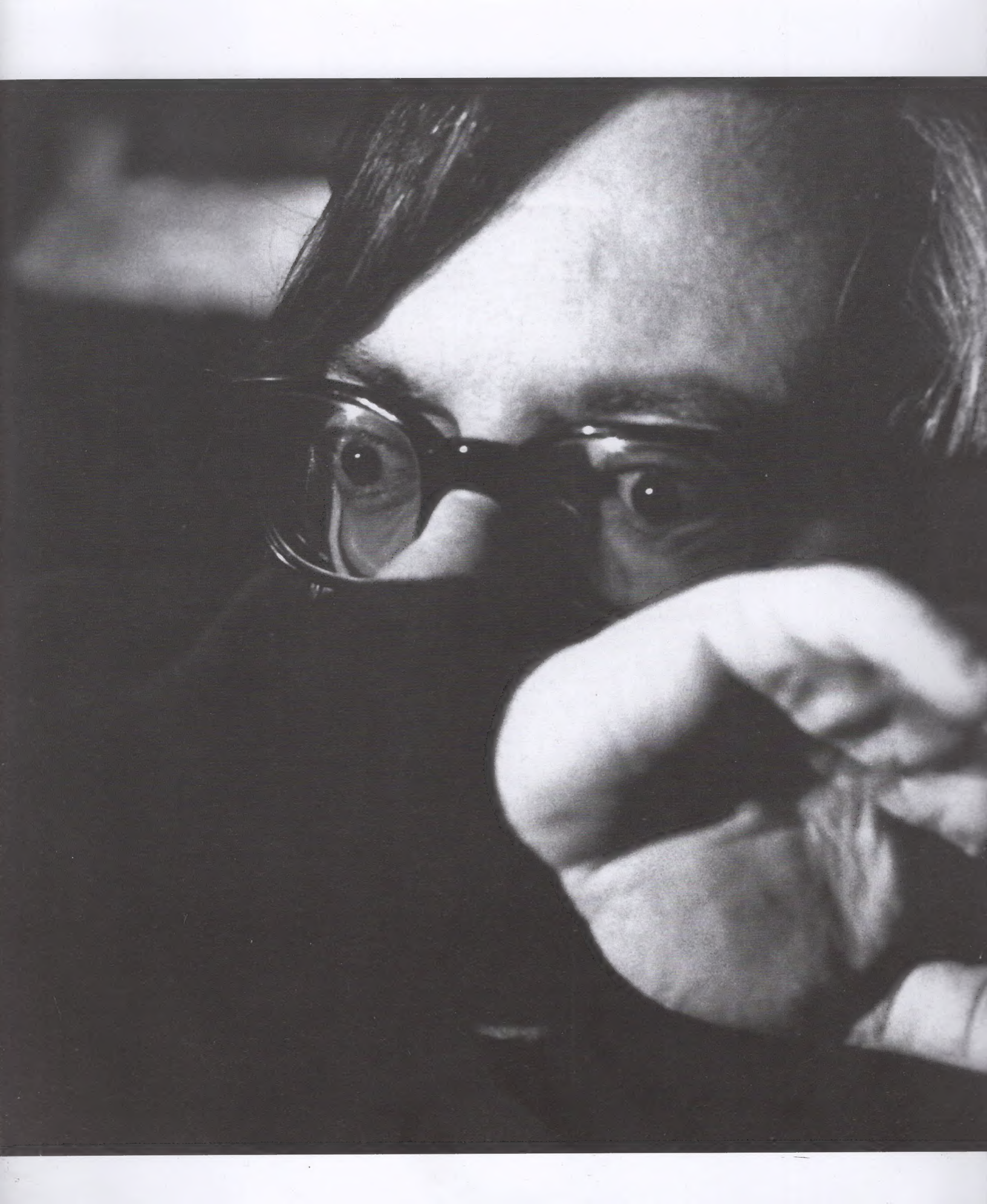
FLOWERS OF PERVERSION

THE DELIRIOUS CINEMA OF JESÚS FRANCO

Volume Two



Stephen Thrower



FLOWERS OF PERVERSION

THE DELIRIOUS CINEMA OF JESÚS FRANCO

VOLUME 2: 1975-2013

by Stephen Thrower

Flowers of Perversion: The Delirious Cinema of Jesús Franco

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Cover image (standard edition): Inés (actress unknown) in *Voodoo Passion*.

Cover image (special edition): Lina Romay (centre) as Sultana, the willing slave of Sadean couple Alberto and Alba De Rosa (Antonio Mayans and Mabel Escaño, background), in *Eugenie historia de una perversión*. Still courtesy of Thomas Eikrem.

Debossed images taken from stills provided by Thomas Eikrem (front) and Uwe Huber (back).

Flyleaf: Jess Franco as Dr. Seward, psychically connected to the suffering heroine in *Shining Sex*.

Opposite page: Dyanne Thorne as the brutal Dr. Greta Del Pino, in *Greta – Haus ohne männer* aka *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*.



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Author's Foreword

Welcome to *Flowers of Perversion*, the second book in my two-volume study of the films and career of Jess Franco. Looking back, I see that I first started gathering study materials for this giant project on the 11th of September 2008. That's ten years ago almost to the day that I write this. You could probably shave two years off that time if only the films had full cast lists, reliable tech credits, and shooting dates accurate to the day! Trying to work out who's who and what happened when has taken up a lot of time and effort. When a filmmaker shoots twelve movies in a single year, arranging them in the correct order is a major challenge; if you're not careful you end up with chaos. This question of accurate sequencing vexes me because it's such a basic biographical requirement: can you imagine a book about Woody Allen putting *Love and Death* after *Annie Hall*? Unthinkable! The Franco challenge is uniquely difficult: if you're writing about David Cronenberg, for instance, each film arrives as a discrete temporal entity; with Franco you have to dig deep, looking for fleeting clues to divine the chronology.

All in all, I have spent ten years of my life thinking about Jess, trying to plot a coherent path through his work, and perhaps most importantly honing and crafting what I hope will be a thrilling and enjoyable 'big read' for fans of this director. Given the maelstrom of minutiae I've uncovered, and the sheer complexity of the task, one thing I most certainly did *not* want is for the resulting book to end up lacking in pleasure for the reader. I love many of these films, I adore the underlying ethos that drove Jess to make them, and I admire the man himself enormously. And that's a striking fact in itself. You would perhaps expect me to have cooled towards my subject over the years, but no: I still adore the best of Jess Franco, there's much to enjoy in the middle-to-average work, and even the lowliest titles can exert a weird fascination. In Jess's entire career there are probably only fifteen films I never want to watch again, out of a total of 181!

Having seen all the Franco films it's currently possible to see, I find myself looking back fondly at the days when my tally was less comprehensive. I suppose what I'm saying is, enjoy the sensation of *not* having seen all of Franco's films. It's precious! If you've seen forty or fifty, you're in a truly luxurious position. You're in the coils of a major obsession and you still have so much to see! The dream-continuum of Franco stretches before you, with its mist-shrouded valleys, brooding coastlines and hidden tribes. Take time to savour the excitement as you head deeper into unexplored territory, like Lina Romay in *Shining Sex*, "travelling through the portals of space" to "an unknown shore, far away." As you venture onwards, may *Flowers of Perversion* be your trusty guide and companion.

Even for me, the journey isn't over. Despite having watched every Franco film currently available, in pretty much every variant edition, I have yet to see *Sex Charade* (1969), still missing after all these years. I thirst for the original unmutated cuts of *Julietta 69* (1974/5) and *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* (1982). And of course there's the tantalising list of films apparently finished but never released. I remain intrigued by these agonisingly unavailable films: they lend Franco's oeuvre a kind of mythic allure, like the fragmentary *Satyricon* of Petronius. Thankfully the films we *can* see continue to exert their weird magic. You might think that after all this time I would be ready to parcel away my Franco collection. On the contrary, would you believe, I'm currently experiencing a powerful urge to start watching the entire Franco catalogue again, in sequence, from beginning to end!

This book would have been impossible without the phenomenal kindness and generosity of a great many contributors, to whom I

would like to draw your attention. Firstly, I want to thank three people whose contributions have been the lifeblood of my research. The kind and humorous Antonio Mayans has shared his life with me in numerous long interviews: he has given this book a richly detailed sense of what it was like to work with Jess. The same goes for Juan Soler, who gave me invaluable help sequencing the films, shone a light on the technical realities of a Franco film shoot, and allowed me to share with you some of his magnificent behind-the-scenes photographs. Both Antonio and Juan could not have been more patient and generous: I would have struggled terribly to make sense of things without them. Completing my holy trinity of core Franco associates, the warm and funny Monica Swinn has helped me so much, bringing her time with Jess vividly to life. Three very special people!

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Katja Bienert, for sharing with me the background story of her time with Jess. The same goes for Italian exploitation movie legend Al Cliver, and cordial French director Alain Deruelle, both of whom made it easier for me to unpick a tangled knot of conflicting information surrounding Jess's cannibal films. I'm very grateful to Dietrich-era director of photography Rudolf Küttel, who shared with me his memories of the period and gave me some spine-tingling behind the scenes photographs, and I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to Emilio Schargorodsky and Exequiel Caldas, for giving the latter part of this book a huge boost with their detailed recollections. Likewise Alberto Sedano, who kindly shared his memories and personal understanding of *Paula-Paula*.

Even more so than with my first Franco book, *Murderous Passions*, the help and guidance of Uwe Huber has been absolutely essential. Uwe's authorised access to Erwin Dietrich's personal archive, and his huge personal collection of materials pertaining to Jess, have enabled me to write a detailed, revealing portrait of an especially turbulent period of Jess's career. I literally could not have done this without him. Guiskard Oberparleiter also provided me with lots of useful information and copious visual materials for Franco's Swiss and German productions, while Roman Güttinger – proud custodian of the 'Franco suitcase' – has been enormously kind allowing me to reproduce elements from the treasure trove inside.

Franco scholarship was brimming with detail and dedication long before I came along, and I've been blessed with assistance from many of its leading lights. Alain Petit's essential magazine series *The Manacoa Files* (recently updated into a phenomenal book, *Jess Franco ou les prospérités du bis*) has been immensely important to me, providing masses of inside-track information and dedicated research. As I worked on this project, hardly a day went by when I didn't have cause to read Alain's work, looking for clues, guidance or corroboration. He has also been unfailingly warm and generous to me personally. Among the other fine writers who have added to the scope and depth of Franco coverage, I'm very much indebted to Christophe Bier, whom I met in Paris two years ago. Christophe welcomed me into his home and showed me his breathtaking collection of Franco rarities, including some of the most striking and unusual stills in this book. He has also provided me with his guidance on specific questions, both directly and through his gargantuan *Dictionnaire des films français pornographiques & érotiques*, a jaw-droppingly meticulous volume that De Sade himself would have treasured. The same goes for Lucas Balbo, Peter Blumenstock, Tim Lucas and Christian Kessler, the team behind the first Franco bible *Obsession*. Tim's Franco insights are scattered far and wide

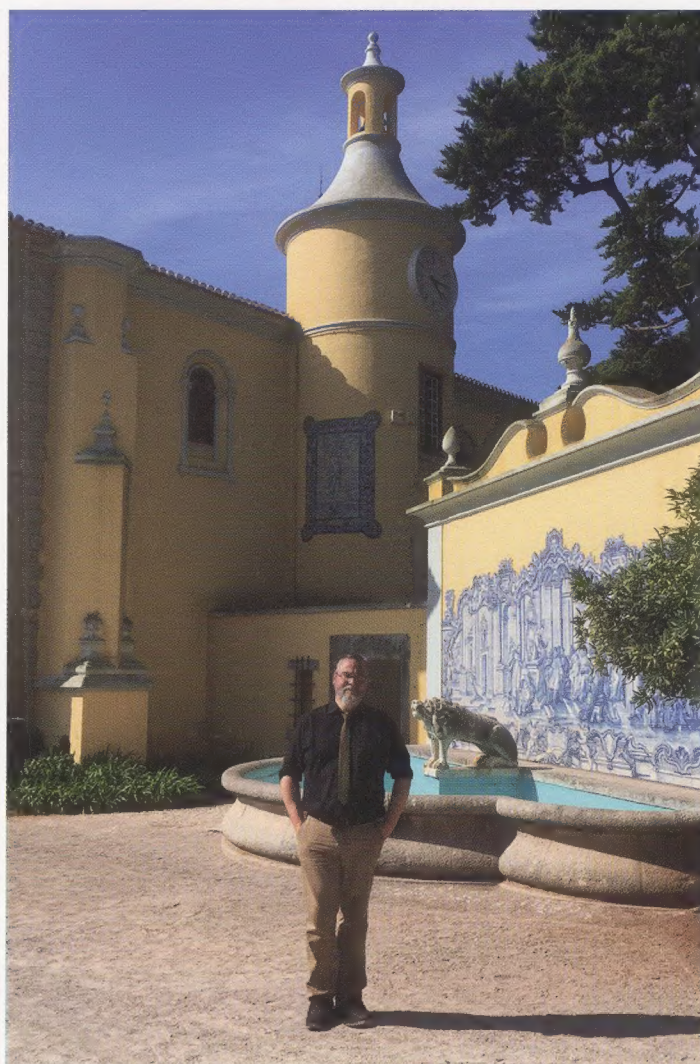
across magazines, disc commentaries and web discussions, and one does not have to stray very far before encountering his never less than valid and often delightfully creative interpretations. Jean-Pierre Bouyxou's insights and kind assistance have also enhanced my appreciation of Franco and his films.

Lucas Balbo not only gifted us the magnificent *Obsession*, he also possesses the most staggering collection of Franco visual materials. Many of the striking pictures in this book came from his vault of marvels. Thomas Eikrem sent me a torrent of eye-popping stills that have given this book so much of its lustre (including the stills for both the standard and special edition covers!). Valuable visual materials also flowed from the very kind and helpful Christian Ostermeier, Armind Junge and Todd Billeci.

Alex Mendibil has been a regular source of valuable information and warm encouragement, and he kindly gave me access to hard-to-see materials; Francesco Cesari's insightful contributions to online discourse have steered me away from errors, and opened up new paths of enquiry; my good friend Éric Peretti kindly gave his time and energy as we scoured the French Bibliothèque National and Paris Cinémathèque archives; Julian Grainger contributed two excellent reviews to this volume and was a valued companion during much of the journey; Pete Tombs kindly gave me his assistance on French translations (and released some top-class Franco titles on his essential Mondo Macabro label). Roberto Curti helped with Italian translation and various synopses; Magnus Jansson and Frédérick Durand kindly sent me rare video releases; William Wilson helped me to access elusive information; James White gave me technical pointers regarding transfer issues; my Lisbon-based friend José Pacheco identified for me the central location used in *Cocktail spécial* and *Je brûle de partout*, and took the photograph you see opposite, and Stuart Lindsay helped to identify some rare Daniel White recordings (check out his spellbinding performances of White's music - search Youtube for 'salexlindsay').

My special thanks to Ania Goszczyńska for once again creating two beautiful debossed artworks for the special edition cover. And my heartfelt appreciation to Frank Henenlotter, whose fervour for all things Franco stoked and encouraged my own. I'm hugely grateful to David Gregory and his partner Lis, who invited me to join them on a tour around Portugal and Spain, shooting a documentary about Franco film locations. A more happy and convivial experience is hard to imagine. The greatest thanks, in terms of both practical assistance and friendly presence, goes to Marc Morris; I have at times descended upon his home like a Franco-obsessed locust storm, and he has always been there for me to chat about the intricacies of this immense shared obsession of ours. And posthumously, I would like to extend a huge thank-you to Erwin Dietrich: his outstandingly lustrous 'Golden Goya' Blu-rays have bestowed upon Jess's work the most dazzling transfers, which reveal just how visually stunning the films really are. A huge thank-you to my publishers, Mark Pilkington and Jamie Sutcliffe, for their sterling and dedicated work, their friendly encouragement, and their unwavering belief in this project. For sheer hard work thanks to Richard Bancroft (proofing and indexing). And last but not least, thank-you to my partner and best friend Ossian Brown, who has done so much to keep things afloat while I've tap-tap-tapped at my computer and filled the house with the orgasmic screams of Jess Franco's wanton women!

I have one more thank-you, and it's a big one: to Jess Franco, for all the many thousand reasons explored in this book. Although he died in 2013, I like to think of him living not just *through* his art,



but *within* his art, in that labyrinth of pleasure designed by his own hand. The films merge like water into sentience, a trans-celluloid brain in which Jess Franco now lives, like a free and ever-rambling thought. Are you there Jess, in that sprawling warren, that borderless maze, that palace of mirrors, that swirling cerebrum of lust, crime, and mystery? Do you swim now, in your sea of images? Do you walk amid the forest clouds of Madeira in *La comtesse noire*? Do you peer at us from the edge of mirrors in *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit*, or float with the Queen of the Night across the moonlit gardens of *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*? Maybe you're camouflaged by dappled shade in the sweet melancholy of *Al otro lado del espejo*; riding the ferry to Africa in *Shining Sex*; rowing ashore in *Bahia blanca*; shopping for expensive trinkets in the night-time Paris of *Faceless*. Not in the roles you played before, but elsewhere, in the crowds, in the blurs, in the streets, in the shadows... Look out for him, reader, having the time of his life, because that's what these films really are: cross-sections through the time of Jess Franco's life. Would it not be perfect if they were also, forever, his own private Monserrate, his Xanadu behind the mist? Paradise, perfect imperfect, but what goes on? What to *do* there? Better film there...



Jesús was un loco peligroso!

Foreword by Juan Soler Cózar

What a way to start talking about Jesús Franco! Perhaps the most prolific director in the history of cinema. Maybe? Or a man scorned and criticised by many of those who never knew him nor saw a single film of his, and unconditionally loved by practically all those who were close to him.

This phrase, 'loco peligroso' or 'dangerous madman', does not of course refer to any psychopathy in Jesús. We used it a lot, with consent and complicity, to refer to those who were out of the ordinary, who broke all the rules. For the different ones, crazy-wild. But he was the most 'peligroso'. If not, why work with him?

All crazy people have something magical. Who does not remember a strong attraction for the circus during childhood, for fantastic realism? What if one day we discovered, despite the fact that childhood was left behind, that we still have that same attraction? Did we suddenly run into it again, unintentionally, by chance?

Well, by chance I stumbled upon the magical world of Jesús Franco. You may tell me it's not a magical world, it's CINEMA. Well, is there any difference?

In the most banal way in the world, the head of local production on a movie shot by Jesús in Portugal called me, to see if I wanted to work on it. I went to the hotel where Jesús was staying. He received me in the lobby, along with Lina. I imagine that some kind of empathy or sympathy arose, and he hired me. That empathy or sympathy lasted more than ten years of almost continuous work. Like everyone else, I have lost count of how many movies I made with Jesús, but I think one day I counted forty-six feature films.

The spell of Jesús seduced me. We lived very close, not only for work – which, as we did one film after another, was like a marriage – but I stayed many times at his home for practical reasons, since I lived in Lisbon. In one last period we even ended up sharing the rent of an apartment in Madrid. Jesús, and Lina who was Catalan like me. We were friends.

Why did the spell of Jesús entrance me? Because it's hard for someone to resist his spells. Jesús was a little man, who, if you saw him riding on a tram, would not attract your attention. However, anyone who might have spoken with him during their few minutes of travel would have been delighted.

Jesús Franco was a magician, sorcerer, film director, screenwriter, musician, actor, shaky camera operator, director of photography in some moments, dubbing artist... the owner of the circus. He did everything, in his almost two hundred feature films.

He had a great knowledge of cinema, literature, arts, music, and so on. And, very importantly, an excellent memory. Having lunch in the same restaurant, at the same table, where Jesús had eaten a paella with Orson Welles years ago, was grounds for a long talk

about cinema, with all the details. This deep knowledge, which made him a great interlocutor for any conversation, also allowed him to improvise any script, any dialogue, any movie, and start a new film from scratch. His ability to improvise and create was immense.

As I got to know them, (Jesús and Rosa Almirall aka Lina) I also identified myself as a dangerous madman. In reality, all those who were part of his group were miming. They all followed Jesús without questioning what they were doing. His magnetism was enormous. For example, Jesús told me that when he asked Klaus Kinski to make another 'pass' in front of the camera, this time from right to left, Klaus immediately knew it was for another film. And he did not protest at all.

With Jesús, we worked almost unconditionally. It was not about money. We didn't earn much, and many times we had serious problems collecting payment from producers. We spent a lot of time filming. However, we all functioned as a family, even newcomers and infrequent visitors. Hence the memory of the circus, of the wandering life. Basically, we travelled with three cars: Jesús and Lina's, Antonio Mayans's and mine. Antonio's car was a magical world apart, like a carriage. Once his wife Juana and their three beautiful daughters had left, in their seats went the clothes, props, masks, whips, all kinds of objects, the most unexpected items in the world, all of them having participated in at least the last six or seven movies we'd shot. After all, that's going back only a few months. And in the trunk, more surprises. Thus was it revealed to be the car of Antonio the production manager, as well as Antonio the actor.

Within this circus world, there was absolute professionalism. Although we'd worked together for many years and we were just a small team, it's not like everything was in jest, or played as a joke. Quite the opposite. We had rigid discipline, which was the only way to shoot a feature film, often in just one week. Nearly all of us took on several functions. We were technicians, actors, extras. Nonetheless, shooting a movie with Jesús was enormous fun. We could not take too seriously all of those characters, those dialogues, the most unusual and improvised special effects, almost nothing that we did. We were quite conscious of it.

I am convinced that, for those who did not participate, it is difficult to understand or believe how it was possible to work like this. Or if in fact it all happened. But the result is very much visible, in that tangled, amazing labyrinth of film, so difficult to navigate and unravel. It was all true. With Jesús, I lived through a decade of amazing experiences and learning. Something unrepeatable happened, and there passed through our circus troupe an intriguing and unending gallery of characters. Take it away, and dance...



DATES AND TITLES

In order to avoid confusion I've chosen to use shooting dates instead of release dates throughout this book when referring to Jess Franco's films. For instance, *Women Behind Bars* was shot in 1975 and will therefore be referred to in the text as *Women Behind Bars* (1975), even though it was first released in 1977. Most reference sources would opt for the release date, and usually it would make more sense, but Franco's career is unusual; if a man makes ten films in a year, some of which are patched together over two or three shoots, several months apart, prioritising release dates obscures the proper sequence. (For an example of the pitfalls, consider two films that were shot back-to-back in 1973 – *Kiss Me Killer* and *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* – which are separated in Franco's IMDb filmography by no fewer than 37 other titles, simply because *Kiss Me Killer* was held up for release until 1977!) To keep the films in consecutive order, it is therefore better to use shooting dates for orientation. In cases where shooting was spread out over time (as in the case of *Die Sklavinnen*, which was begun in the summer of 1975 but finished in the autumn of 1976) I have used the earlier date. Whilst this throws *Murderous Passions* out of step with other reference sources, I hope that the internal consistency of my decision will assuage inconvenience and reduce ambiguity.

Titles are another problematic area. Throughout the text I use the best known English language title where there is one (usually the Blu-ray or DVD title, or failing that the British or American cinema release). Where there is no English-language version I've gone for the original foreign language title, prioritising the chief financial backer in the case of international co-productions. In some cases anomalies create exceptions: for instance, it seems pedantic and tedious to refer to *Helter Skelter Part One: Pleasure and Pain* (the correct onscreen title) when *Helter Skelter* is less cumbersome and was used in all marketing. *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* has entered circulation on DVD as *Revenge in the House of Usher*, and *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* came out as *Cecilia*, but in both cases these English-language titles relate to markedly different versions of the film with new material added later, therefore the original Spanish title takes precedence.

Stephen Thrower





The Flamingo Club proudly presents...

Jess Franco Unleashed!

Wild music, stimulating spectacle, beautiful women...
Extreme and exotic delights for your viewing pleasure



WARNING - SHOW CONTAINS NUDITY, BLOOD, SADISTIC SITUATIONS

The book you hold in your hands is the second in a two-volume set dedicated to the long and astonishingly prolific career of Jesús (aka Jess) Franco. In the first volume, *Murderous Passions*, I examined the films Franco made between 1959 and 1974: sixty-four in total. Here in *Flowers of Perversion* we pick up the fast-flowing current of Franco's career circa 1975, and follow its course to the end, over a hundred films later. Franco died on the 2nd of April 2013, still embroiled in the habit of a lifetime: turning his wild and frequently erotic flights of fantasy into moving images. He had recently completed *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* (2012) and was preparing a follow-up, *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies*, when he passed away. This last project was therefore finished on Franco's behalf by his trusted friend and frequent collaborator, the actor Antonio Mayans.

Since his death, Franco's star has remained in the ascendant. There are now an astonishing forty-five of his films available on Blu-ray, and that number is likely to go through the roof in 2018 and 2019, with at least another twenty films lined up. Such a massive commercial commitment is only viable because audiences around the world are still hungry for more of Jess Franco's special breed of insanity. His dark eroticism and uncompromising individuality continue to exert a delicious fascination, as does the size and complexity of his labyrinthine filmography. There's a lot of Jess Franco to discuss in *Flowers of Perversion* – three-and-a-half decades in fact – but before we get started let's remind ourselves of the overall shape of those preceding years.

Franco's first feature film as director was *Tenemos 18 años* (1959), a picaresque story of two girls on vacation who meet a succession of strange, occasionally frightening people on their travels. A light-hearted comedy, with a bitter-sweet ending and a freewheeling approach to narrative, it showed an ironic sensibility and a nascent talent for the blurring of reality and illusion. Franco followed it a year later with *Labios rojos*, a thriller which inaugurated one of his favourite storytelling formats: the adventures of a pair of female private detectives, the 'Red Lips', who give both the criminal underworld and hapless police the runaround. Two musicals, *La reina del Tabarín* (1960) and *Vámpiresas 1930* (1961) demonstrated the breadth and variety of his developing talent, but his next film was to have a more profound effect...

Gritos en la noche (aka *The Awful Dr. Orlof*) was a ghoulish tale of Gothic horror about a deranged turn-of-the-century surgeon reconstructing his daughter's face with the flesh of unwilling donors. It was a huge success in Spain, and sold well abroad too, playing in France, Italy, Great Britain, Mexico, Argentina and the USA. It made Jesús Franco a name to watch and consolidated his business relationship with French producer Marius Lesoeur, whose company Eurociné had co-produced *La reina del Tabarín* and scored a sizeable hit with *Orlof* in France. Their association would sustain Franco, on and off, throughout the 1970s and on until the late 1980s.

Franco followed *The Awful Dr. Orlof* with *La muerte silba un blues* (1962), a crime story with film-noir trappings, before returning to horror with *La mano de un hombre muerto* aka *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* (1962), a rather muted though occasionally sadistic tale of madness and murder. *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963) was a deluxe refinement of Franco's film-noir ambitions, and *El Llanero* (1963) was a period adventure in the mold of the Zorro films, with some stylistic and thematic similarities to the American Western. After the brooding melancholy of *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964), which revisited the Orlof family tree in a modern day setting, a chance encounter with the legendary Orson Welles led to Franco being invited to shoot second unit on Welles's *Chimes at Midnight*. A jealous rival tried to scupper this dream assignment by whispering to Welles that he should watch a recent 'abomination' by Franco, *Rififi en la ciudad*: however Welles saw the film and liked it (not least for its obvious Wellesian touches). The two became friends, with Franco also assisting on the American genius's *Treasure Island* (a never-to-be-finished project for which Welles was shooting material at the same time as *Chimes at Midnight*). Franco learned a lot during his time with Welles, but the most profound and lasting influence was the idea of shooting two films simultaneously, or 'back-to-back', a tricky procedure that became standard practise in his later work.

Franco's fourth horror film, the haunting and visually stunning *Miss Muerte* aka *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965) was co-written with Luis Buñuel's friend and scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière. Like *Labios rojos*, it established a theme that would run through Franco's future work; in this case, a woman under the psychic control of a malevolent Svengali committing a string of murders against her

will. Franco and Carrière also collaborated on another film for the same producers, *Cartas boca arriba* aka *Attack of the Robots* (1965), which tapped into the James Bond superspy craze and did well in Spain and France, thanks to the presence of American actor and Continental screen sensation Eddie Constantine. After another Constantine vehicle, *Golden Horn* (1966), a troubled production that failed to match the success of its predecessor, Franco took a third stab at the spy comedy format with *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1966). This was his most ambitious production so far, a Spanish-Italian-German co-production with a sizeable budget. However the film was not a success and further Italian funding dried up. On the plus side, *Lucky* introduced Franco to a German backer, Karl Heinz Mannchen, who was instrumental in setting up a meeting with Adrian Hoven, an actor-turned-producer who'd recently formed a company called Aquila Films with fellow actor Michel Lemoine. Franco, Hoven and Lemoine got along well, and so Franco was signed by Aquila to make three films.

The first of these, *Necronomicon* (1967), was an artistic breakthrough for Franco. With it he cut himself loose from strict genre templates and headed for the misty slopes of his own fantasy world. The story of a voluptuous S&M stage performer (French model Janine Reynaud) whose life drifts into metaphysical chaos at the psychic urging of a mysterious Svengali, it's a deeply idiosyncratic work which blurs the line between truth and fantasy, sex and horror, art and sleaze. He followed it with a twin pair of screwball crime capers, *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster* (both 1967), which re-introduced the Red Lips girls, this time played definitively by Janine Reynaud and Italian beauty Rosanna Yanni. Packed with crazy ideas, sardonic jokes and parodic irony, these films are the apex of Franco's comedy crime output, and while they're frequently illogical and sometimes completely chaotic, they are also quite incorrigibly beguiling.

In 1968 Franco met an English film producer called Harry Alan Towers. With business interests so byzantine that they would require an entire book to delineate, Towers was a charismatic but rogueish sort of gent with a trail of questionable (and in some cases illegal) activities behind him. His films were complex co-productions patched together with money from multiple international sources, loosely corralled under the business name Towers of London. He and Franco got along like a house on fire, and within a few weeks they were working together. Through an association with the American company Commonwealth United, Towers was able to obtain American co-finance for some of Franco's films. This extra money bought a significant raft of British and American acting talent, beginning with Christopher Lee who signed up for *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968). For the next two years Franco, working from scripts co-written by Towers, directed some of the most expensive and commercially prestigious films of his career. *The Girl from Rio* (1968) was a bit of a dud, although it did boast some flashy art design and a guest appearance by George Sanders, but *99 Women* (1968), a story of brutality and lesbian seduction in a women's prison, was far more compelling, and gave Franco a sizeable hit.

He would be drawn to its Women-in-Prison format again and again over the next fifteen years, directing eight such movies between 1972 and 1983. Although *99 Women* was restrained in comparison to the brutal 'WIP' films he directed later, it was still shocking enough for a distribution manager working for Commonwealth United to snub Franco at a showbiz dinner-party!

More Towers productions followed in quick succession. *Justine* (1968) was a lavish costume drama which saw Franco adapting the work of the scandalous Marquis De Sade: like *99 Women*, it inaugurated an obsession that would propel him through multiple reiterations in future years, as he returned to Sade's writings again and again. It also introduced Franco to the firebrand German actor Klaus Kinski, who played the author himself in the film's linking scenes. They would go on to make three more films together, climaxing with *Jack the Ripper* in 1976. *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968) starred Lee in the second of his seven appearances for Franco, although this time the devil-may-care quality of Franco's direction displeased Towers and led to tensions in their working relationship. Nevertheless, they still had several major productions lined up. The first was *Venus in Furs* (1968), a dreamy surrealistic horror film which successfully mined the same spaced-out territory as *Necronomicon*. It marked the beginning of Franco's sixteen film association with Swiss actor Paul Müller, who was to become of inestimable value to the director's repertory cast in the 1970s. A second Marquis De Sade adaptation followed: *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion* (1969) was a stronger effort than *Justine*, blending Franco's preference for languid and narcotic atmospheres with the stability and commerciality of the Towers production style, with Christopher Lee playing the pivotal role of Sade's mouthpiece character, the libertine sensualist Dolmance.

A few months later, Lee lent his considerable presence to a pair of films which marked the commercial pinnacle of Franco's association with Towers. In the first, *The Bloody Judge* (1969), he played the infamous Judge Jeffreys; in the second, *Count Dracula* (1969), he gave his most detailed and nuanced performance yet of Bram Stoker's classic vampire. Of these, *The Bloody Judge* was by far the better film, a sumptuous costume drama with strong performances (from Leo Genn, Maria Röhm, and Lee in particular) and plenty of shocking torture scenes, not all of which survived in the film's many international variants. *Count Dracula* however was a frustrating misfire: Lee was excellent, and Franco's latest discovery Soledad Miranda was luminous in the role of Lucy, but, according to Franco, Towers spent so much money wining and dining the star that when it came to filming scenes without him there was barely any money left! While this may have been true, it's also true that the script, which was supposed to have been the first faithful adaptation of Stoker's book, fails dismally to navigate the complexities of the novel. The film was mauled by the critics and fell short of commercial success too. Franco's relationship with Towers was at an end.

The *Count Dracula* débâcle may have left Franco on the ropes for a few weeks, but it didn't damage him for long. He had another

string to his bow, one that would sustain him along a different route, aside from the mainstream movie world. Sandwiched in between the last two Towers productions were a couple of films that would point the way to his future career. *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit* aka *Nightmares Come at Night*, begun in 1969 and completed in 1970, was an extremely low budget film made with a cast of six and an even smaller crew. Franco started it without the backing of a producer; instead he supplied the funds himself under the auspices of what appears to have been his own company, Prodif. He negotiated a deal with Eurociné in 1970 for completion money, and the film eventually slipped out in Belgium in 1973. In style and approach it was very much a forerunner of the haunting minimalist horrors that Franco would make in the early 1980s, and can be seen as one of the cornerstones of Franco's personal style. Sadly the same cannot be said of *Sex Charade* (1969), which was a harbinger of things to come in a rather less positive way. It too was financed by the director, and shot using a tiny cast and crew, but it failed to secure a proper release anywhere in the world. Instead, it was doomed to become the first 'lost' Franco film. Although parts of it may have been chopped into another film, seen fleetingly in Paris by Franco scholar Jean-Pierre Bouyxou in the mid-1970s, it remains to this day frustratingly unavailable in any form.

In January 1970, Franco directed a third film in his newly minted 'minimalist' production style, and it proved to be one of the most important of his career. Like *Nightmares Come at Night* it was begun on Franco's own coin before receiving a helping hand from Eurociné. It first turned up in French and Belgian cinemas in 1973 as *Eugenie De Sade*, and in Italian cinemas as *De Sade 2000*. Franco's third (loose) adaptation of a Marquis De Sade story, it emerged as one of his most artistically successful films, a stifling and morbid work of eroticism about a father and daughter whose pact of murder is sealed by incestuous lust. *Eugenie* also offered a meditation on Franco's personal attitude to the Sadean theme of murder for pleasure, via a character called Tanner whom he played himself; a writer fascinated by the crimes of the two sadists, who observes but doesn't intervene.

After shooting *Eugenie*, Franco turned to Artur Brauner and his Berlin-based company CCC Filmkunst for new financial backing. A solid and reliable outfit, having been in operation since the 1940s, CCC financed a run of five Franco films in a co-production deal with the Spanish company Cooperativa Fénix Films: *Vampyros Lesbos*, *The Devil Came from Akasava*, *X312 – Flight to Hell*, *Der Tödesracher von Soho*, and a project originally commissioned as *Mabuse 70* (released in Germany as *Dr. M schlägt zu* and in Spain as *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*). Franco also came up with *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970) during the same production block, bankrolled exclusively by Brauner's CCC Filmkunst. Although none of these films boasted the budgets or international marquee names of the Towers era, they were nevertheless made with established German performers like Siegfried Schürenberg, Ewa Strömberg, Horst Tappert and Gila von Weitershausen, many of whom were well known for TV as well as film work.

Vampyros Lesbos was the strongest film of the package, its dreamy erotic delirium based around the astonishing screen presence of an intensely beautiful young actress called Soledad Miranda, whose role in *Eugenie* had already marked her out as the jewel in the crown of Franco's cinema. In *Vampyros Lesbos* she was cool, seductive and utterly convincing as a languid lesbian vampire modelled on Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, her performance the mesmeric still centre around which the film's hallucinatory imagery swirled. Franco himself was smitten, having found in this talented young woman the perfect focus for his cine-erotic gaze. Simultaneously cold and sensual, haughty and fragile, vulnerable and ferocious, she lent Franco's new films a powerful feminine focus. Even a slight and underwritten film like *She Killed in Ecstasy* came to life through her performance, as a vengeful woman hunting down the people who drove her husband to suicide. Tragically, Soledad Miranda was killed in a car crash on the 18th of August 1970, on her way to sign a contract with Artur Brauner for a further run of films with Franco. It was a devastating emotional blow for Jess. In later years, when the subject of the accident came up in interviews, he would turn sombre and reflective: the trauma of his loss never really left him.

Between 1971 and 1975, Paris was Franco's chief source of film finance. Laws governing sexual content were becoming more liberal in France, so as the lure of eroticism exerted a greater and greater pull on Franco, his quest for more freedom led him to the Champs Élysées offices of Comptoir Français du Film Production, run by industry veteran Robert De Nesle. Starting in 1971 with a French-German co-production called *Trois filles nues sur l'île de Robinson* (or *Sexy Darlings* in the UK), Franco swiftly became CFFP's star director, making a string of extraordinary films which shuttled vigorously between horror and eroticism, the latter often coloured with a dark and downbeat quality that spoke of a recently more pessimistic turn of mind. *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1971), *Daughter of Dracula* (1972) and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972) presented a loose trilogy in which classic movie monsters duked it out amid a febrile atmosphere of lurid sex and violence; *The Demons* (1972) revisited the witch-burning horrors of *The Bloody Judge* with added psychedelic music, anti-Catholic imagery and greater sexual explicitness; *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* (1982) and *Les Ébranlées* (1972) told sombre tales of sexual exploitation in the swinging milieu of the Canary Islands; *How to Seduce a Virgin* (1973) revisited the Marquis De Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* and mixed the sex with bizarre sadistic imagery of paralysed human 'statues'; *Countess Perverse* (1973), one of Franco's best films, told the tale of a rich couple on a remote island who hunt down and eat young women; *Al otro lado del espejo* (1973) was a sad and poetic journey into trauma, about a girl driven insane by her father's suicide on her wedding day; *Lorna... the Exorcist* (1974) was another signature Franco film about a witch who claims a man's teenage daughter, body and soul, as payment for the spell which made him rich; and *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (1974) rolled elements of the Red Lips films into a

semi-pornographic free-for-all, with crime, torture, black comedy, and a monster whom the heroines fuck to exhaustion. Such was Franco's galloping rate of film production in the early 1970s that even these examples account for just half of the total number made for De Nesle!

In addition, Franco continued to make films for Marius Lesoeur's company Eurociné. *Female Vampire* (1973) was a melancholy trip into the mists of a vampire's love life starring Franco's new muse Lina Roday; *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973) was a stifling attack on family values with a pathetic patriarch lording it over his brain-damaged daughter and crazed nymphomaniac stepdaughter; *Kiss Me Killer* (1973) was a turgid and unsatisfying remake of *La muerte silba un blues*; *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* (1973) was a Francoesque spin on the sort of quasi-giallo films Umberto Lenzi was making with Carroll Baker in Italy; and *Exorcism* (1974) was a vital and sleazy-as-hell tentpole in Franco's career, in which he himself took the central role of a murderous religious lunatic. Eurociné also gave Franco the funds to finish off *La Nuit de Pétioles filantes*, a spellbinding poetic reverie which he'd begun in Portugal in 1971. Released in France as *Christina, princesse de l'erotisme* and then as *Une vierge chez les morts vivants* (aka *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*), it was to become one of Franco's most celebrated films, although Eurociné tried their best to ruin it in later years with the addition of some risible 'Romeroesque' zombies, shot by Jean 'I'm only following orders' Rollin, the otherwise exemplary auteur behind such masterpieces as *Requiem pour un vampire* (1971), *La rose de fer* (1973) and *La nuit des traquées* (1980).

While neither CFFP nor Eurociné were big companies (their budgets were smaller than CCC Filmkunst's and minuscule next to Harry Alan Towers'), when it came to the content of the films they tended to let Franco do what he liked. Later, if they felt that a film was too pornographic, or not pornographic enough, they would ask him to create variants of the film in question, with new material added and old material peeled away to meet the requirements of different markets. Franco rarely enjoyed this, but he knew that if he didn't do the job himself the producers would simply pay someone else to do it, making a mess of the original in the process. In this way, the sombre *Al otro lado del espejo* (released in Spain in 1973) became the more frankly pornographic *Le miroir obscène* (released in France in 1975). Some films, such as *The Hot Nights of Linda* and *Exorcism*, were reconfigured over and over again as their producers tried to keep pace with changes to the law. Both of these titles were forcibly mutated to play in regular theatres as horror films, or porno theatres as sex films. Sometimes Franco lost patience, or simply wasn't invited, and instead the films were spliced with dubious material shot by other directors. *Christina, princesse de l'erotisme*, for instance, was spliced with new material shot by Pierre Querut. CFFP took Franco's mainstream Women-in-Prison film *99 Women* and paid someone to shoot lots of ugly hardcore scenes for it, titling the resultant mongrel *Les Brûlantes*. *Le miroir obscène*, which Franco had already doctored at CFFP's request from the original *Al otro lado del espejo*, gained extra porno

inserts – in the middle of Franco's own porno inserts! – for its Italian variant *Lo specchio del piacere*. Yet despite being a complete mess in plot terms, *Lo specchio del piacere* is worth seeing for the dedicated Franco fan because it also includes material shot for *Al otro lado del espejo* which appeared in neither the original version nor *Le miroir obscène*! Such, then, was the labyrinthine complexity of Franco's output in the 1970s.

In filmmaking, money comes with strings attached: the bigger the budget, the bigger the obligation. Films like *Justine*, *99 Women* and *The Bloody Judge* were conceived by their wheeler-dealer producer Harry Alan Towers as entertainments for a mass audience, and given that the American market was the most significant target, the films were tailored to fit. Franco enjoyed working with Towers, and he loved having access to the stars whom Towers could afford, but on the other hand he felt constrained by the demands of American production associates to stay within acceptable boundaries. Left to his own devices, Franco didn't care two hoots about the moral sensibilities of the mass audience. As long as there was an audience of some kind for his shocking and transgressive fantasies, he was willing to forego access to the mainstream. Tailoring his films to a specialised demographic – thrill-seekers, decadent drop-outs, fringe aestheticians and sex addicts – he was able to delve deeper and deeper into his obsessions.

There are those who regard Franco's films of the 1960s as more competent and professional than his later films. Viewed from this angle, the earlier films are 'better' because they're more technically polished, and made in accordance with traditional standards of craftsmanship, with larger casts, larger crews, and a feeling that the traditional machinery of filmmaking is being deployed 'correctly'. Films like *Justine* (1968) and *The Bloody Judge* (1969) feature international stars like Christopher Lee and Jack Palance, dependable American and British character actors like Mercedes McCambridge and Leo Genn, hordes of extras, convincing period costumes, and lush Hollywood-style orchestral scores by Bruno Nicolai. Although they may include some shocking or excessive sequences, they play by the standard aesthetic rules and would not have looked out of place on a double bill with contemporary Hammer films.

Others, however, regard the earlier films as lacking Franco's personal touch. From this point of view, a film like *Justine* is too slick, a 'classy product' which panders to the demands of the market, whereas the ultra low budget *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* (1980) and *Gemidos de placer* (1982), also loosely based on De Sade, feel torn from the director's private fantasies and owe nothing to commercial pressures. From this point of view, the films of the 1970s and 1980s are much purer, less influenced by mass market requirements. They dance and flicker to the rhythms of Franco's delinquent and capricious imagination, while commercial considerations are pushed back in the mix. Franco himself tended to disparage some of his early work, especially *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, which he described as a 'museum-piece': "Every time they invite me to a festival or take me to some tribute, the first thing I find is Gritos en la



noche [i.e. *The Awful Dr. Orloff*], and *I always say to the kids and the journalists, that movie is buried now, fuck, it's a pain in the ass.*" Period context didn't cut any ice with him: "Really good movies have to be seen out of context. To enjoy Gritos you have to make historical references and things like that, it really has been shrivelled like parchment."

However, whilst I too regard the 1970s and early-to-mid 1980s as Franco's artistic pinnacle, it would be terribly wrong to denigrate the earlier films. There's so much to admire in them, and even to adore. The black-and-white horror films co-produced by Marius Lesoeur's Paris based company Eurociné – *The Awful Dr. Orloff* (1961), *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964) and *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965) – may be more sturdy and classically shot than the likes of *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975), and *Devil Hunter* (1980) but they're still not really conventional. *La muerte silba un blues* (1963) and *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963) are affectingly sad and sombre works which see Franco operating skilfully within the downbeat world of film noir. And while comedy genre pastiches like *Attack of the Robots* (1965) and *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1966) fall rather flat when it comes to the jokes, they're far from formulaic structurally.

My earlier Franco book *Murderous Passions* ended with a run of five films made for French producer Robert De Nesle in 1974: *Celestine, An All-Round Maid* (a period-costume sex comedy), *Lorna... the Exorcist* (an erotic horror film), *Les Chatouilleuses* (a naughty-nuns romp), *Le Jouisseur* (a modern-day sex comedy) and *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (a bizarre crime caper). By this point Franco was well into his heyday, making films quickly, cheaply, and freely. A special kind of rolling, galloping energy had been unleashed, and judging by his passion for this way of working it had all the hallmarks of a drug. Faster and faster, more and more impulsively, he conceived, shot and edited film after film after film. In some cases the results were marinated in the sheer whirlwind joy of making them; in others, the ragged edges and barely formulated scripts left an impression of a director dividing his attention too much, a man who was already prepping his next film in his mind's eye while the current one was in front of the camera.

Franco's friend, the actor Howard Vernon, was unconvinced by the wisdom of Franco's hasty approach, telling the French magazine *Ciné-Girl* in 1977: "Franco I do not understand. It's like a

woman who brings a child into the world and then, in the middle of the birth, she takes a knife and says 'I'm bored' – so she cuts out whatever comes first and then has half a baby. I do not want to speak ill of Franco, but I deeply regret this, because here is a guy who could have made extraordinary films." Yet while one can see what Vernon is getting at, there's another school of thought (to which I subscribe) which celebrates the sheer kinetic blur of his production method. His lust for speed liberates moods and sensations than would never emerge from a more sober and measured process. The stylistic 'scrawl' of his reckless camerawork; the urgent probing of the zooms lens; the fragmentary narratives scribbled on restaurant napkins without a second glance for plausibility; the maniacal embrace of impossible, illogical, incoherent situations – these are qualities in their own right, and they give to us a unique form of cinema that feels ripped from the unconscious of its maker, an access-all-areas pass to the dreamscape. Emerging from Franco's fast-and-loose style and his casual mise-en-scène is a body of work as idiosyncratic as any in the cinema. As for his exuberant lack of concern for stylistic rules; it must surely resonate with anyone for whom disobedience is the key to joy.

In *Flowers of Perversion* we pick up the story in 1975, when major changes are looming. In his never-ending search for new financing, Franco has become aware of a Swiss producer making waves in the erotic film industry with a string of successful softcore movies which play not only in Germany and Switzerland but also in the USA and Great Britain. French producers CFFP and Eurociné are struggling to keep up with Franco's work rate: neither of them can satisfy his constant thirst for production money. Without further ado, Franco grabs his passport and catches a plane to Zürich to meet the man who will finance his next sixteen films, including some of the most shocking and sleazy of his career: producer, director, studio-owner and porno entrepreneur Erwin C. Dietrich. Dietrich loves his ideas and it isn't long before Jess is on his way to the South of France, with a contract in his pocket for three new films. Gathering his closest friends and associates (Lina Romy, Ramón Ardid, Monica Swinn) and some new friends from the South of France (Martine Stedil, Ronald Weiss and Denis Torre), he launches into a long hot summer of production. It will be far from plain sailing...

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JULIETTA 69

Portugal & France, 1974-75

French visa no: 44507

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Julietta 69 (FR)

There is no known Portuguese version of the film

Theatrical re-edit by Joe D'Amato

Justine (IT theatrical)

Justina Lady Lujuria (SP theatrical/video of Italian re-edit)

Le porno libidini di Justine (IT theatrical – advertising only)

The Porno Lusts of Justine

Alternative titles

Juliette 69 (title recorded by the CNC)

Julietta 69 (la suceuse) (Rex International pre-release title)

La Lujuria de Justina (SP alt. – Seville cinema listings)

Lujuria (SP video cover of Italian re-edit)

Unconfirmed titles

Les phantasmes de Justine (FR alt.) *The sexual fantasies of Justine*

La suceuse *The sucker*

Les Suceuses (FR alt.)

De Sade's Juliette [Petit]

Justine and the Whip [bootleg DVD]

Dynamikoi angeloi tou erota [GRE theatrical?]

Dynamic Love Angels

Production companies

Jess Franco [Manacoa] original version

Dany Film (Rome) Italian re-edit

Theatrical distributors

Rex International (France)

Marbeuf (Paris) (source: LFF)

Cosmopolis Films (Brussels)

Colombo Film (Rome)

Orange (listed on Archivio del Cinema Italiano)

Timeline

First shooting period	Autumn	1974
Second shooting period	April	1975
Paris	31 March	1976
Metz (France)	09 June	1976
Marseilles (France)	16 June	1976
French visa issued	09 July	1976
Italian cert 73810 issued	31 July	1979
Turin	09 October	1979
Madrid	14 May	1984

Barcelona	25 February	1985
Seville	29 June	1985

Theatrical running time

Original version*	82m
France (Rex International edit)	64m
Spain	95m

* 80m according to listings magazine Pariscopes

Video and DVD running times (converted)

Italy	84m31s
Spain (Films Video 28*)	85m44s

*cover title *Justina Lady Lujuria*; screen title *Justine*.

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Dave Tough']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Dave Tough']. assistant director: **Claudio Bernabei**. costumes: **Lucio Parise Dal Pozzo**. prints and processing: **Telecolor**. sound recording: **Sincronizzazione Elettronica Calpini**. music: **Nico Fidenco**, published by West Edizioni Musicali. supervision: **Joe D'Amato**.

Cast (Julietta 69): **Lina Romay** (Juliette). **Alain Petit** [as 'Charlie Christian'] (Donatien). **Gilda Arancio** (Donatien's companion). **Ramón Ardid** [as 'Raymond Hardy'] (Raymond, a playboy). **Marlène Myller** [as 'Carole Morelli'] (Andrea). **Vítor Mendes** (the ambassador). **Richard De Conninck** [as 'Bigottini'] (Morand). **Jess Franco** [as 'Jess Frank'] (the voyeur). **Lise Ferrère aka Lise Franval** [as 'Lisa Ferrera'] (blonde lesbian). **Fernanda Franco** (Martine). **Monica Swinn** (smoking sunbather). **Caroline Rivière** (sunbather). **Victor Costa**.

Cast (Justine): **Lina Romay** (Justine). **Gilda Arancio** (Chris's companion). **Alain Petit** [as 'Charles Christian'] (Chris). **Jess Franco** [as 'Jess Frank'] (the voyeur). **Ramón Ardid** [as 'Raymond Hardy'] (Raymond, a playboy). **Lise Ferrère aka Lise Franval** [as Lisa Ferrera'] (blonde lesbian). **Jany Scott**. **Mel Rivers**. *uncredited players from Juliette 69:* **Marlène Myller** [as 'Carole Morelli'] (Ingrid, Justine's lover from school days). **Monica Swinn** (smoking sunbather). **Caroline Rivière** (sunbather reading magazine). *uncredited players from Midnight Party and Shining Sex:* **Evelyn Scott** (Helen). **Yul Sanders**. **Olivier Mathot** (Robert). **Ilona Kunesova** (woman at nightclub). **Madeleine Quiquandon** (barwoman). **Ramón Ardid** (Joe). **Nicole Guettard** (woman in white top drinking and smoking at the club).

Synopsis (Julietta 69): *At the end of a dissolute life, Juliette returns to her native country, Portugal. Retreating to a hotel room with the intention of committing suicide, she thinks back to the people who have most influenced her, and the sexual experiences that have brought her to her current state of despair. She remembers her initiation by an obese Oriental diplomat, her affair with a lesbian servant, her perverse experiences as a prostitute, and her meeting with Raymond, a fickle,*

superficial playboy. Finally she dwells upon Donatien, the only person she ever really loved. Donatien, a devotee of the Marquis De Sade, introduced Juliette to sadomasochism but could not himself completely embrace the Sadean enjoyment of crime and cruelty. As a result he could never satisfy her sexually. In love with Juliette and aware that their relationship was doomed, Donatien killed his girlfriend Gilda, and then committed suicide by hanging. Desperately lonely, trapped in a cruel existence with no hope of happiness, Juliette puts a gun inside her vagina and pulls the trigger.

Synopsis (Justine): In a state of intense depression, Justine, a stripper, toys with a loaded gun in her bedroom and reminisces about her life with Chris, a rock musician at the club where she works. For some time the two had enjoyed a blissful open relationship but recently it has foundered. We see the course of her recent life through a series of flashbacks depicting sexual encounters with men and with women ... The first is with Helen, a rich older woman who likes to watch Justine strip. Justine and Helen go back to a hotel room and make love, although Helen is detached and sexually repressed ... After a tense discussion with Chris about the need to make changes in their relationship, Justine takes time out and heads for the coast. Depressed and lonely, she sits on the rocks and gazes out to sea. Sensing that her relationship is falling apart, she tries to forget about Chris in the arms of Joe, Helen's young chaperone. At a party she accepts his offer to dance and the two of them go to an upstairs bedroom and make love: they are joined for a while by a woman they see taking a drunken nap in the adjoining bed. Chris, meanwhile, hears a rumour that he's about to be sacked from his nightly spot at the club. He confronts Robert, the owner, and threatens to leave. Robert sneers that he can do as he pleases, so Chris quits ... In voice-over Justine pines for Chris, but admits she was forced to go into prostitution to support the two of them ... One day she meets an old flame, Ingrid, a woman she knew when they were teenagers and with whom she had her first sexual experience. They become intimate once again ... To get Chris his job back, Justine flirts with Robert, who wearily agrees to her demands. Chris, however, is angry when he hears what she's done. Returning to his apartment, Chris beats Justine in a fury, with a leather whip. When he storms out without making love to her, she lies on the floor, masturbating and licking her own blood. Next she seeks solace in the arms of Robert, whom she describes as a "normal man": happiness eludes her, however, as he suffers a fatal heart attack while making love to her. After a further threesome with Chris and a female friend of his, which ends with him whipping both girls in a religious frenzy, Justine slides back towards prostitution, visiting a strange little man who likes to watch women masturbate but cannot bear to be touched. Joe, who lives next door, offers Justine a more passionate sexual encounter ... In a bedroom with Ingrid and Justine, Chris sits by the bed, reading from a King James Bible about sin, sex and womankind ... Justine has a threesome with Joe and Ingrid, and during the revels starts to whip her female friend, just as Chris had done to her. She's an unconvincing sadist, however, and her attempt to assert dominance ends with Joe mounting her from behind ... One day, Justine discovers that Chris has hung himself in his bedroom. Frenzied with grief, she fellates his lifeless body ... Back in the present, trapped in a cruel existence with no hope of happiness, Justine puts a gun inside her vagina and pulls the trigger.

Production notes: Little can be said about the original version of *Julietta 69*, because after its French cinema release in 1976 it dropped out of circulation entirely, and to this day remains frustratingly inaccessible. Although Franco's French films of the 1970s often remained on the exhibition circuit for years after their first run, popping up on an ad-hoc basis well into the 1980s, *Julietta 69* was not so fortunate. Although it performed well enough for a film of its type, spending four weeks on release in Paris before touring the regions, it was never re-released; nor did it surface on French video in the 1980s. No one has been able to trace the original French release for DVD or Blu-ray, so the only version we can currently see is a bowdlerised 'mash-up' supervised by Joe D'Amato in 1979, which chewed the film into pieces, threw half of it away, and mixed the remainder with scenes from Franco's *Midnight Party* (1975) and *Shining Sex* (1975).

Opinion is divided among those who saw the original theatrical release. Critic Jean-Pierre Bouyxou described it in the pages of the French adult movie magazine *Sex Stars System* as, "A total botch-up of heartbreaking emptiness, that goes almost as far as self-sabotage". However, film critic Alain Petit, who appears in the film as the key character of Donatien, felt differently: "It was a very dark, depressive movie, very morbid also, surely one of the darkest of Franco's movies. No trace of humour, just wicked sex, despair and a strange climate of dark poetry."¹

So, what do we know about this elusive film? Like *Female Vampire* in 1973-74, *Julietta 69* was a patchwork production, made intermittently over several months. According to Petit, it began shooting in Portugal in 1974, on 16mm, with money (and perhaps film stock) squeezed from the budgets for *Les Chatouilleuses*, *Le Jouisseur* and *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (a trio of Franco films bankrolled in the summer of 1974 by Robert De Nesle). Franco shot a few scenes featuring Vítor Mendes and Lina Romay, then showed the unfinished film to De Nesle and asked for more money to complete it. De Nesle, however, was experiencing financial difficulty at the time and declined to take the project any further. Franco therefore spent his own money to finish the film, shooting in April 1975 at a luxurious hotel near Fontenay-Tressigny where he'd recently made *Celestine* and *Exorcism*. Among the cast members for this second shooting period was 'Carole Morelli' (real name Marie Royer), a friend of Petit's who later came to prominence in French hardcore under the name Marlène Myller (see Jean Rollin's *Phantasmes* or José Benazeraf's *Voir malte et mourir*).

With the film completed, Franco reportedly created an English-language version at a Paris recording studio, using pre-existing music by Daniel White (including a theme which White had composed for the famous children's TV series *Belle et Sébastien*). This was then sold to a double-headed Franco-Belgian distribution partnership called Rex International/Cosmopolis Film, the latter of whom had just released Franco's *Female Vampire* (1973) in Belgium. However, according to Petit – who is one of the few to have seen the original cut – Cosmopolis felt that severe trims were needed to prevent the film from being banned outright.

Franco was furious and walked away from the project, an unusual step for such a broadly pragmatic director who'd already made numerous compromises for producers such as Robert De Nesle and Eurociné.²

Why did Franco react so strongly to producer interference on what was always something of a patchwork production? Evidently he felt there was something special about the film. Perhaps the revolutionary mood in Portugal was contagious: *Julietta 69* was shot during the Portuguese 'Carnation Revolution' which began with a military coup in Lisbon in April 1974 and lasted until November 1975. He may also have resented a minor distributor, whom he scarcely knew, taking liberties which were hard enough to stomach from his regular producers.

What happened next is a little unclear. Some accounts say that Franco washed his hands of the French release and took the film to Italy, where he sold it to Arrigo Colombo, an industry player who struck gold as co-producer of Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars*. (Colombo at the time had just produced Lina Wertmüller's *Pasqualino Settebellezze*, making him an odd, indeed unlikely, buyer for Franco's film...)

If Colombo did buy it, he must have had a change of heart about the material: it lay fallow until 1979, when Franco Gaudenzi of Flora Film bought it (presumably from Colombo) and commissioned Joe D'Amato and Bruno Mattei to rework the material by adding scenes from *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*. In an interview on the DVD documentary *Joe D'Amato Uncut* (1999), D'Amato himself said, "It all started when Gaudenzi bought some Jess Franco films, Justine [sic] and some others. We tried to make a usable film out of them." (Although he says "Justine" here, it's safe to assume he meant *Julietta 69* aka *De Sade's Juliette*, and was mixing up the title of the source material with the title of the eventual rehash!)³ Using footage from all three, D'Amato and Mattei created a mutant version of *Julietta 69* that was eventually released in Italy as *Justine*.

One wonders how Gaudenzi came to buy not only *Julietta 69* but also *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*. After all, it seems so fortuitous: they were shot very close together in early 1975, which meant that the two stars, Alain Petit and Lina Romy, look exactly the same in all three films. Appearances even match when it comes to Romy's distinctive personal grooming of the period (see review). The most likely explanation is that *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex* came via Prestige Film⁴, who distributed them in Italy circa 1976-77 (as *La coccolona* and *Piaceri erotici di una signora-bene* respectively). In charge of dubbing at Prestige was the multi-talented Bruno Mattei, a close associate of D'Amato's⁵ who went on to become a well-known exploitation director himself. Mattei is credited onscreen as the editor of *Justine*, so it may have been he who acted as the conduit between Dany Film and Prestige.

As it happened, Mattei was already familiar with Franco's style, having worked on several of his earlier films as editor, namely *99 Women* (1968), *Count Dracula* (1969), and the Italian release of *Venus in Furs* (1968), the latter a strikingly different cut to the

American version called *Paroxysmus*. Did he spot the similarities and suggest to Gaudenzi that a montage of all three would be viable? Or did Franco himself recommend to Mattei that he use *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*? Someone must have realised, before the deal was done, that the films were unusually well suited together, and that person must therefore have been very familiar with the material. So either Bruno Mattei spotted the connection, because he'd worked on the Italian releases of *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*, or else Franco himself was aware of the plan to create a new version of *Julietta 69* and suggested to Mattei (or Gaudenzi) that he should obtain the Prestige prints of the other two films.

Typically, such a complicated journey to the screen is entirely hidden by the screen credits for *Justine*, which mention only one production company – 'Dany Film' – a business set up by D'Amato himself in 1973 to launch his first ever horror movie, a delirious and spellbinding piece of Gothic lunacy called *Death Smiles at Murder*. And while it's probably just a coincidence, D'Amato's tale of an icy female beauty wreaking revenge from beyond the grave bears more than a passing resemblance to Franco's *Venus in Furs*...

Review: To discuss *Julietta 69* we must turn to *Justine*, the version created by Joe D'Amato in 1979 using additional clips from *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*. This tone-collage of footage, drawn from three unrelated stories, sees D'Amato trying, with limited success, to put a narrative gloss on the material while including the maximum number of sexual couplings. A busy man like D'Amato would not have wished to labour over the task, so in constructing a new narrative he took the safest and quickest route to completion: voice-over. The storyline comes to us almost exclusively through the depressed heroine's reminiscences, which are dubbed over the action to provide a through-line for the sexual adventures onscreen. For Franco aficionados, the main reason to watch D'Amato's version is the chance to see roughly 48 minutes of *Julietta 69*. Sadly this leaves 34 minutes of Franco's original film on the cutting room floor, so we must console ourselves with just a partial sense of what the original was like. Judging by the way D'Amato stitches sex scene after sex scene together with little or no linking tissue, one suspects that it's the dialogue sequences we're missing. Judging by what we can see, I would rate *Julietta 69* above Bouyxou's apocalyptic assessment, and closer to Petit's description; I suspect that the complete version would occupy a space in the Franco canon next to the likes of *The Hot Nights of Linda* – in other words, not in the top tier, but nevertheless of great interest.

Why the change of name? Well, one has to admit it's a wise decision: D'Amato evidently knew his Sade, because the film's central character has far more in common with the writer's eternal victim, Justine, than his joyously wicked anti-heroine Juliette. When she licks the blood from her own wounds after being whipped by her enraged boyfriend, it's clear that the new title adds rather than subtracts literary resonance: quite what possessed Franco to call the film *Julietta 69*, when the name Juliette refers to Sade's favourite female libertine, is hard to fathom. The emphasis of the film is on hollowness and melancholia: the *misfortunes* of libertinage, you





might say. It is by far the least Sadean of Franco's tangential Sade adaptations: the fire, the joyous rage, the maliciousness of De Sade, are nowhere to be found. Instead we observe the life and death of a woman for whom sadomasochism is simply something into which she has accidentally slipped, at the behest of a troubled male partner scarcely more cheerful than she. With gloomy sex scenes, two suicides, and some 'more in sorrow than in anger' flagellation, the material steers towards the depressive side of Franco's emotional palette, all of which seems if not to deserve then at least explain Jean-Pierre Bouyxou's rebuke in *Sex Stars System*: "Where is the sizzling Sadean subversion here, eh Franco, you who had once created with Eugénie the only film worthy of the divine Marquis?"⁶

Moving on to the film's content, lesbianism and childhood sexual awakening are summoned vividly in one of the film's most memorable and transgressive sequences. Justine bumps into an old friend, Ingrid (Marlène Myller) and they reminisce about their school days, and the sexual bond they shared when they were young. As is the iron rule in this film, the two women then head for the nearest bedroom, where Lina Romy, with total nonchalance, soaps and then shaves her pussy. Franco zealously parks the camera about six inches from her pubic mound to observe the process in minute detail. Ingrid's remark as Justine starts trimming her pubic hair ("We didn't have hair then, remember?") neatly contextualises Justine's at first seemingly random decision to shave her vagina; it's an attempt to return to the child-like joys of burgeoning sexuality and an escape from the ennui and lassitude of the present. From here, Franco pushes fearlessly into the realm of Lolita fantasy, albeit within a completely adult context. Ingrid, watching Justine, says: "Why did you do that? What do you want to prove?" In response, Justine walks across the room, her now hairless pussy exposed to the camera, and places Ingrid's hand upon her sex: "I am a child," she says, "Just like then. A little girl. Feel it? Just like then." This flirtation with memories of childhood, and the re-enactment of a child's role in a sexual context, is part of the film's character study. Justine is in a spiral of depression, alcohol and suicidal feelings; her desire to play 'little girls' with her old schoolfriend is a wish to return to a prelapsarian state, before adulthood and its crushing disappointments. Along the way, Franco's sensitivity to lesbianism (accompanied of course by his lustful gaze) results in dialogue positing same-sex liaisons as paradisaical, a way of stepping outside the crossfire of heterosexual antagonism: Justine declares, "Homosexuality was, for me, a quiet place where I could anchor my lost soul." Is this a line from Franco's original version, or was it written by D'Amato? Both men are now lost to us, so we may never know, but if it's D'Amato's addition it's entirely in sympathy with Franco's views on sex between women. The scene concludes with a classic Franco flourish: Lina Romy walks straight towards the camera, her vagina fully exposed, until she's virtually pressing her flesh against the lens and blacking out the image – much as she does in the opening credits of *Female Vampire*. This crossing of the conventional 'safety zone' between performer and camera signifies much about Franco's voyeurism. The blazing desire to

draw ever closer to warm inviting flesh is finally thwarted by the cold mechanics of the situation, a charged collision between the symbolic and the real which Franco duly leaves in the film instead of cutting away.

The 'pussy-shaving' scene is important for structural reasons too. The whole edifice of *Justine*, with its mélange of footage from *Julietta 69*, *Shining Sex* and *Midnight Party*, rests on the fact that Lina Romy stars in all three. The illusion of unity is helped along by what we might call 'serendipitous grooming': in other words, having shaved her pussy on-camera in *Julietta 69*, Lina Romy remained smoothly shaven in *Shining Sex* and *Midnight Party*, made immediately afterwards. The only thing that lets down the illusion is Romy's hair, which gets caught, as it were, in the spokes of *Justine*'s whirling flashback structure. In the *Julietta 69* footage her hair is straight and long; in the other two films it's set in a loose perm. This would be fine if the flashback structure kept the two hairstyles apart: straight hair for the present, curly for the past. Unfortunately D'Amato needs the sex scenes from *Julietta 69* for his flashbacks, resulting in Romy's hairstyle oscillating between straight and curly when supposedly the scenes are contiguous.

D'Amato's decision to reconfigure *Julietta 69*'s Sade-obsessed Donatien as a bible-clutching fundamentalist (called Chris) grabs a hold of the character and gives him a massive thematic twist. My first impulse was to castigate D'Amato for doing this, but bearing in mind that in the original film Donatien commits suicide after a life of deep melancholy, in which sadism clearly offered no more than transitory relief, fidelity to De Sade was already pretty tenuous. Donatien may read from De Sade while flogging women in *Julietta 69*, but he's hardly a convincing libertine. Judging by Petit's subtle and nuanced performance, the pain of others brings him no pleasure; instead he flagellates women like a man trying to whip something out of himself by proxy. As for Donatien/Chris's suicide, and the heroine's alarmingly necrophiliac response, the scene was reportedly cut by Cosmopolis when they created their French release version (see Production Notes), so it seems we have D'Amato to thank for preserving one of Franco's most morbid and shocking sequences from obscurity.

If we can find it in our heart to forgive Franco for turning one of De Sade's most energetically depraved anti-heroines into a depressed masochist drowning her sorrows with a bottle of cherry liqueur, what we get in return is a film that blends the downbeat mood of *Al otro lado del espejo* and *The Hot Nights of Linda* with a variety of bleak sexual couplings and a morose voice-over in the style of *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. For anyone with a taste for both the savage and the sorrowful in Franco's cinema, the continued absence of a director's cut of this fascinating work is extremely regrettable.

The Julietta 69 footage: *Justine* uses the following 48m30s of material from *Julietta 69*: Julietta sunbathes on a rooftop verandah with two other women ... walks the streets of Lisbon during the Carnation Revolution (note the graffiti on a wall, 'Forças armadas', meaning 'armed forces') ... fellates a bottle of liqueur before

◀ Lina Romy gives a totally abandoned and paroxysmal performance as the troubled Juliette.

removing a gun from a drawer and pointing it at her own head ... masturbates with the gun ... sits on a rocky coastal clifftop and looks out to sea ... has sex with Raymond (Ramón Ardid) and Andrea (Marlène Myller) in a hotel room ... lies on a bed drinking from a bottle of ginjinha (a popular Portuguese liqueur made from sour cherries); shaves her pussy in a wardrobe mirror before making love with Andrea ... has sex with a blonde woman (Lisa Ferrera) ... accompanies Donatien (Alain Petit) to his hotel room where he whips her in a fury ... and lounges on her bed with a gun. Donatien and Gilda (Gilda Arancio) go to bed together, where they are joined by Julietta; Donatien whips the two women while they have lesbian sex ... A male voyeur (Jess Franco) flicks through a magazine: Julietta enters the room, shows off her shaved pussy, and tries to seduce him. He cringes from her touch, so she leaves ... Julietta has full sex with Raymond and a threesome with Raymond and Andrea, during which she whips the other woman. Raymond watches, then takes Julietta from behind ... Julietta finds Donatien dead in his room, hanging by the neck. She fellates the dead man's penis then retires to her room and shoots herself in the vagina.

The Midnight Party footage: (to avoid confusion I will refer to the actors not the characters): Alain Petit plays guitar and sings with a band at a nightclub ... Lina Romay performs a strip routine at the club ... Romay runs across a bridge and into the arms of Petit ... Romay and Petit recline in bed together ... At a party, Romay meets Yul Sanders and Evelyne Scott with Jess Franco in attendance ... Olivier Mathot drinks at the bar of a nightclub; Petit approaches him to discuss Romay (the scene is redubbed for *Justine*, becoming a conversation about Petit quitting his job) ... Romay dances semi-nude at the nightclub ... Romay flirts with Mathot, and then with Petit in quick succession, backstage at her show.

The Shining Sex footage: (to avoid confusion I will refer to the actors not the characters): Lina Romay speaks to Evelyne Scott and Ramón Ardid at the club, then goes to a hotel to have sex with Scott ... Romay dances at the club ... Olivier Mathot and Romay have sex at Mathot's house, during which Mathot has a seizure and dies (in *Shining Sex* the seizure is the result of malign supernatural forces emanating from Romay, in *Justine* it's a simple heart attack).

Franco on screen: Franco's cameo, as a pathologically nervous man who hires a prostitute for voyeuristic purposes and refuses sexual contact when it's offered to him, is both ironic (the porno director as gynophobic wallflower) and to some degree revealing (Franco often claimed that he was something approaching a pure voyeur, keen to watch not participate). The magazine he's reading is *Euro Cinema* (January '75, No.23), the cover of which depicts Pamela Stanford suckling Lina Romay in Franco's brilliant erotic-horror film *Lorna...* *the Exorcist* (1974). And as if we needed evidence that *Lorna* is a film close to Franco's heart, we see him caressing a still from it! It's strange though, that he doesn't perform a double-take when one of the girls on that very magazine cover (Romay) enters the room and exposes her pussy!

Cast and crew: Joe D'Amato, it must be said, deserves better than to be castigated for his work on *Justine*. Commercially at least, he's the closest there's ever been to 'another Jess Franco', and although the artistic similarities are superficial (based mainly on the two men's shared love of cinematic sex and horror) he deserves credit for directing some outstandingly morbid and transgressive movies. Like Franco, D'Amato created genre-busting combinations of horror and pornography in films like *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals* (1977), *Le notti erotiche dei morti viventi* (1980) and *Porno Holocaust* (1981). Like Franco, he directed a sex-themed mondo (*Sexy Night Report*, 1977), a demons-in-the-convent tale (*Immagini di un convento*, 1979), a grisly contribution to the early-eighties slasher craze (*Absurd*, 1981), a couple of Maciste-style 'epics' (*Ator the Invincible*, 1982, and its sequel, 1984), as well as a deluge of hardcore porn. Like Franco, D'Amato's directorial results vary according to the money available, and the frame of mind with which he approaches his projects, but unlike Franco his core style is mainstream-friendly. He brings a hard-nosed commercial savvy to his work, and there's no 'imp of the perverse' within him such as the one which drives Franco to such extraordinary stylistic extremes. If D'Amato's content is sometimes just as shocking as Franco's, the form is rarely so avant-garde or distinctive. He made his name on the international film markets with a highly lucrative string of *Emanuelle* films, and had the business sense to remain in control of his work and reap the long-term benefits. Franco himself found D'Amato sympatico, describing him to Álex Mendibil as "a professional guy and a very nice person."⁷ He died in 1999, leaving a body of work in the region of 200 films.

Monica Swinn, a regular presence in Franco's films of the 1970s, was initially puzzled when a mention was made of her involvement in this film, but her recollection sheds an amusing light on Franco's spontaneous approach to filmmaking: "I didn't even remember being in that movie. And then all of a sudden some pictures came back to me. I saw myself again in Portugal, in Cascais, tanning on the roof of the hotel where we were staying during the shooting of the "Nuns" [Les Chatouilleuses], Les Grandes Emmerdeuses and the "Sexiest Man in the World" [Le Jouisseur]. With me on this terrace were several girls from the team: Lina, of course, but also Lisa Ferrera and Caroline Rivière, if I remember correctly. We were there, more or less naked, lying on sun loungers quietly taking in the sun, when Jess appeared with Ramón and the camera. After asking each one's permission, he walked around for a while, shooting rather long shots of those who had accepted the principle. We knew, of course, that one day he would use these images in another film than the ones we were officially shooting at the time... Which one? Mystery! In such cases, Jess was careful not to reveal his plans! It seems that the scene was seen in "Julietta 69"... But anyway, it would be a great exaggeration to say that I played in this film: I bronze silently with my eyes closed on a chaise longue."⁸

Music: *Julietta 69* featured music drawn from the work of Franco's regular composer Daniel White, but for the *Justine* version Joe

D'Amato chose selections by his own regular musical collaborator Nino Fidenco. The title theme ("I Celebrate Myself") was culled from Fidenco's score to D'Amato's *Emanuelle in America*, and further cues came from D'Amato's *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals*. The replacement of White's music with Fidenco's illustrates with great clarity how essential music is to the spell that Franco weaves. For instance, the scene borrowed from *Shining Sex* in which Lina Romay and Evelyne Scott have sex is largely altered in mood and impact. In *Shining Sex* it has a bizarre alienated vibe with a powerful undercurrent of sexual dysfunction and fear. With the trimming of the scene to a shorter length, and the imposition of Fidenco's swooning strings and Euro-lounge melodics, the scene is normalised: perhaps not entirely (the newly added dialogue has Justine saying, "You know you're a very strange woman?" to explain Scott's tense performance) but overall the scene as redesigned by D'Amato has a dreamy romantic patina very different to the dysfunctional weirdness crafted by Franco.

Locations: Lisbon in Portugal, with some interiors filmed in France at a mansion near Fontenay-Tressigny in the Val de Marne, previously seen in Franco's *Exorcism* (1974). Donatien's lavish bedroom is the same room in which *Exorcism*'s religious maniac Vogel (played by Franco) murdered Maria-Theresa the dominatrix (Monica Swinn) in *Exorcism*, while the hotel room in which Julietta makes love with Andrea and Raymond is almost identical to the one in which Vogel murdered the Cartiers in the same film (presumably an adjacent suite). The *Shining Sex* and *Midnight Party* sequences were shot in the South of France and the outskirts of Paris (for more details see the entries for these films).

Connections: The title of course suggests De Sade's novel, *Juliette, or Vice Amply Rewarded* (1797). However, as already noted the film is completely unrelated to Sade's text. Sade's Juliette is a character of limitless amorality and opportunism; Franco's Juliette winds up shooting herself in depression after the suicide of a lover ... On the windowsill of Donatien's apartment we see a pile of books, including one of the 16-volume set called "Oeuvres complètes Marquis De Sade" published in Paris by Cercle du Livre Précieux in 1967-68 ... In *Justine*, Chris quotes the King James Bible, Leviticus 18:17 – "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; for they are her near kinswomen: it is wickedness." ... Romay wears her cape from *Female Vampire* in the scene prior to the whipping sequence where she accompanies Donatien to his hotel room.

French theatrical release: *Julietta 69* performed fairly well, for a low budget hardcore production, and was by no means an ignominious failure. It opened in Paris at four cinemas (the Beverley, the Axis, the Gramont and the Cinevog St. Lazare) on 31 March 1976, and during its first week pulled a decent-sized audience of 11,647 viewers. In its second week (on the same screens minus the Beverley) total attendance rose to 15,190. For its third week the film moved to a single screen, the Neptuna, and

for its fourth and final week in Paris it moved to the Sébastopol. The final audience tally for the four-week run was 21,384. This puts *Julietta 69* well within the reach of previous Franco films such as *Les Chatouilleuses* and *Le Jouisseur* but falling short of the likes of *Célestine... bonne à tout faire* (one of Franco's best-grossing erotic films of the period). With the Paris run finished, *Julietta 69* moved to the provinces. On 8 June 1976 it opened in Metz, a city in the north-east of France near the tripoint border with Luxembourg and Germany. Amazingly it was placed No.1 for its opening week, with an audience of 4410: by comparison, the second highest draw that week was Roman Polanski's *The Tenant*, which attracted 3136 viewers. Why was the film such a hit? Perhaps the fact that Metz is a garrison town explains why a sex film found such an enthusiastic audience! The following week saw *Julietta 69* play Marseille in the South of France, arguably the second most important market in the country. This time it was less successful, attracting only 1922 paying viewers. Why? Perhaps because competition was more intense in Marseille, a city second only to Paris when it came to the number of sex cinemas on offer. Figures for provincial screenings published in the French trade paper *Le Film Français* don't include attendances below 800, so it's possible that the film stayed on the circuit a while longer, playing to smaller audiences, but that's as far as I can track it. What's clear, though, is that *Julietta 69* performed pretty well for a sex film with not a lot of promotional support.

Other versions: The proliferation of alternative titles reported over the years does not mean that the film played in numerous variants across Europe. Instead it seems that these titles have crept into circulation by accident or through faulty memory. *Julietta 69* is the title under which the film appears in the pages of the Paris listings magazine *Pariscopes* and the French trade magazine *Le Film Français*. However, the country's official film registry the CNC (Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée) gives the title as *Juliette 69* – whether due to distributor or clerical error is unclear. Alain Petit, in his book *Jess Franco ou les prospérités du bis*, calls the film *De Sade's Juliette*, and since he's actually in the movie it's likely this was the intended title of Franco's first cut before he walked away. The oft-reported alternative title *Les suceuses* ('The Suckers') sounds like the sort of brusque porno moniker Robert De Nesle would have given the film if Comptoir Français du Film Production had bought it, but as noted earlier he turned it down due to lack of money. So where does this title come from? Rex International's pre-release title, as reported in some French production catalogues, was *Julietta 69 (la suceuse)*, so the additional phrase must have been intended by Rex to ensure that audiences recognised a sex film. It is not to be confused with Claude Bernard-Aubert's hardcore movie *Les suceuses* (1979).

The Italian poster for the Franco/D'Amato version, *Justine*, misleadingly claims that Alice Arno is in the film. This was a common fib at the time; Arno was a box-office 'superstar' in Italian porno and unscrupulous distributors thought nothing of conning horny ticket-buyers hoping for a glimpse of their blonde

goddess. Another variant title that requires explanation is *Le porno libidini di Justine*, which turns up in Italian newspaper listings during October and November 1979. This definitely relates to the D'Amato re-edit, but given that it went to the Italian censor as *Justine*, and the Italian theatrical poster used the one-word title too, from where does this longer name originate? A news article in *La Stampa* dated 11 October 1979 sheds some light on the issue. When the suburban Orfeo cinema in Turin re-opened under new management, after a period of closure, it did so as an adult theatre, and the first film to play there was *Justine*. No doubt to avoid being accused of misleading the general public, the new management added stickers to the advertising artwork for *Justine* (posters and lobby cards) changing the title to *Le porno libidini di Justine* ('The Porno Lusts of Justine'), thus making it crystal clear what to expect. The film itself, however, unspooled in the theatre under its accepted one-word title.

Five years later, in 1984, the D'Amato edit played theatrically in Spain under the title *Justina Lady Lujuria*, gaining an onscreen quotation from Persian poet Omar Khayyám ('*A day you have spent without love – there is no day more lost than that*'). It's unclear whether this appeared in the original version; it does not appear in the Italian *Justine*.

Problematica: As noted above, Alice Arno is given top billing on the Spanish print and the Italian poster, but she doesn't appear in the film. Vítor Mendes and Bigotini are credited in the Spanish version but they don't appear either (their names seem to have been held over from the original 1975 version, but their scenes were not used for the D'Amato cut) ... Lisa Ferrera is credited as 'Lisa Ferrini' on the Italian poster, while Bigotini is credited as 'M. Digottini' ... *Obsession* lists Estudio-8 (Lisbon) as producers of the original version, although Alain Petit's book *Jess Franco ou les prospérités du bis* does not concur. Estudio-8 were later responsible for Franco's *Ópalo de fuego* (1978) and *Sinfonía erótica* (1979). Their only other known credit is the Spanish-Portuguese co-production *El padre Coplillas* (1968), a musical by Ramón Comas. This at first appears unconnected to the Franco films until one spots Víctor Costa and Joaquín Domínguez in the credits as production managers. Costa was the production manager on four of Franco's Portuguese-shot productions (*Dracula's Daughter*, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *The Demons* and *Les Chatouilleuses*) and production assistant on another (*Le Jouisseur*); Domínguez (full name Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo) was the majordomo of Tritón, P.C., a company that would go on to produce Franco's *The Sadiest of Notre Dame* (1979), *Las chicas de Copacabana* (1978-9), *El sexo está loco* (1980) and *El lago de las vírgenes* (1981). Furthermore, Franco's *Ópalo de fuego* (1978) was a co-production between Tritón and Estudio-8. It's been speculated that Estudio-8 was Franco's own company, set up to produce his Portuguese-lensed films: to me it seems more likely that Franco bought into Estudio-8 after someone else, perhaps Riesgo, had already set it up. This would explain the 'odd-one-out' production *El padre Coplillas*.

MIDNIGHT PARTY

(export title)

France, Belgium [& West Germany], 1975

French visa no: 45668

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Midnight Party (FR)

Heisse Berührungen (WG) *Hot Touch*

Belgian theatrical title unknown

Alternative titles

La coccolona (IT theatrical) *The Cuddly One*

Minuit partouze (FR alt. theatrical listed by *Le Film Français*)

Lady Porno (SP theatrical)

La partouze de minuit* (FR video) *The Midnight Orgy*

La partouze de minuit (FR poster)

Porno dama (US 'Unicorn Video' release)

Porno Pop (pre-filming title/unused export title)

Minuit Party – Porno Pop (title of Franco's script outline)

Sylvia la baiseuse (alt. shooting title) *Sylvia the horny girl*

* video-generated title placed over original title *Midnight Party*

Production companies

Eurociné (Paris)

Brux Inter Films (Brussels)

Production companies (German print)

Cinemec-Produktion (Berlin)

Production companies (Spanish print)

Titanic Films (Spain)

Belfilm (Belgium)

Theatrical distributors

Eurociné (Paris)

Avis-Ascot (West Germany)

Prestige Film (Italy)

American-European Films (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date	April/May	1975
Germany	23 January	1976
Naples	17 September	1976
Vigevano (Italy)	09 November	1976
Rome	08 February	1977
French visa issued	11 January	1977
France premiere	28 June	1977
Paris	07 December	1977
Nancy (France)	04 January	1978



TOP: Sylvia (Lina Romay) is questioned by the less than gentlemanly spy Agent 008 (Jess Franco), while Radeck's assistants (Monica Swinn and Ramón Ardid) observe the finer points of interrogation technique.

BOTTOM LEFT: German lobby card for the same film as Heisse Berührungen, depicting Romay and Olivier Mathot as private eye Alphonse 'Al' Gauthier, and BOTTOM RIGHT: German poster mentioning only Lina Romay from the cast, and featuring a model who does not appear in the film.



AVIS
FILM

HEISSE
BERÜHRUNGEN

AVIS
FILM

ERWINO. DIETRICH



HEISSE
BERÜHRUNGEN

Seville	20 January	1983
Barcelona	24 January	1983
Madrid	22 August	1983

Theatrical running time

France	65m
Germany ('X' certificate)*	63m29s

Video & DVD running times (converted)

Midnight Party (GER DVD: Tonfilm)	93m50s
Heisse Berührungen (GER DVD: Tonfilm)	75m44s
La Cocolona (IT VHS: Cinehollywood)	78m36s

* A longer version may have been shown in porn cinemas.

Director: **Jess Franco** [as 'James Gardner' (FR); 'Manfred Gregor' (GER); 'Tawer Nero' (SP)]. **writer:** Nicole Guettard [as 'Nadine Foucart' – actually **Jess Franco**]. **dialogue adaptation:** **P.C. Garnier, H.L. Rostaine**. **producer:** **Marius Lesoeur**. **director of photography:** Gerard Brissaud [actually **Jess Franco**]. **camera operator:** **Jess Franco, Ramón Ardid**. **music:** **Daniel J. White**, published by Carrousel. **Song** "La vie est une merde". **lyrics:** **Jess Franco**, **music:** **Alain Petit**. **camera assistant:** **Philippe Vandaele**. **assistant director:** 'Pierre Catesson' [in this case probably **Gerald Cazal**]. **editor:** Josiane Belair [actually **Jess Franco**]. **set manager:** **Madeleine Quiquandon**. **continuity:** **Nicole Guettard**. **laboratories:** **Fotofilm** (Madrid), **Technifilm** (Brussels).

Doubtful, erroneous or pseudonymous credits – German version: camera: Ramon Gimenez. *dialogue:* Christine Lembach. *Italian version:* story and screenplay: Roland Bourriquet. *film stock:* Eastmancolor. *format:* Cinemascope. *studios:* J.F.I. Nimes. *Spanish version:* 'director': Tawer Nero. *sets:* Jean Querut. *story and screenplay:* Julio Perez-Tabernero. *editor:* C. Lecoque. *photography:* Christian Bollinger. *executive producer:* Julio Perez-Tabernero.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Sylvia Sanders, a stripper ['Laura' in SP version]). **Olivier Mathot** (Alphonse 'Al' Gauthier, a private eye/CIA operative). **Alain Petit** [as 'Charlie Christian'] ('Red' Nicholas ['Johnny Colombus' in SP pressbook], Sylvia's guitarist boyfriend). **Jess Franco** (Janos Radeck, Agent 008; or [MF] Agent 0010 alias Durand ['Vicas' in SP pressbook]). **Ramón Ardid** (Radeck's male assistant ['Carlo' in SP version]). **Monica Swinn** (Marthe, Radeck's female assistant ['Annie' in SP pressbook]). **Claude Boisson** [as 'Yul Sanders'] (Joe Di Loggia). **Evelyn Scott** ('Miss Fang' or Evelyn [MF]). **Pierre Taylou** (Pierre, Sylvia's husband ['Jacques' in SP pressbook]). **Madeleine Quiquandon** (Madeleine, the barmaid). **Gerald Cazal** (moustached man at bar). **Iona Kunesova** (woman sitting opposite Quiquandon at bar). **Nicole Guettard** (woman in dark glasses at the club). *Italian poster adds:* **Isabel Gargano**.

Notes: *La cocolona* adds Alice Arno and Angelo Bassi to the cast-list, although neither are in the film. The Spanish pressbook adds Nadine Focarde as 'Marta' and the unfortunately named C.L. Fartier as 'Daniel'. The Italian poster adds another mystery cast member, Lana Grey. Franco's notes for the film indicate that he was toying with crediting Romay under the pseudonym 'Sylvia Sanders', presumably to tie in with the fact that she's called Sylvia in the story: she is, after all, supposedly playing herself!

Synopsis: *In a direct-to-camera address Lina Romay introduces herself as 'Sylvia' and hopes that we'll enjoy watching the film – at least, enough to help further her career. We subsequently meet the men in Sylvia's life: Pierre, a feckless musician, Alphonse, a private eye, and Nicholas, a professed left-wing radical. Invited to a party at the bequest of a sinister couple, Sylvia gets very drunk and finds herself making out with them. Her night of fun turns to horror as she awakes to find the couple dead, and a sinister hit-man determined to extort information from her, under torture if necessary... Sylvia is abducted, then freed, then abducted again, until her male friends begin to worry... Alphonse comes searching for Sylvia at the house of Joe Di Loggia, a shady individual who works for the Albanian Secret Service and has faked his own death to avoid assassination. Gaultier shoots him to save Sylvia; it transpires Gaultier is more than just a private eye; he's working for the CIA. After a tangle with the evil Radeck leaves Gaultier dead, it's up to Nicholas to try and save poor Sylvia's life...*

Production notes: Of all the films Jess Franco made in the 1970s, probably the most difficult to get to the bottom of is 1975's *Midnight Party*. Over the years it has been the subject of numerous contradictory assertions regarding its genesis and financial backing, a chaotic state of affairs which reflects Franco's cavalier business habits during the mid-1970s. The players in this saga are Jess Franco himself, the French production company Eurociné (specifically Marius and Daniel Lesoeur), and the Swiss producer Erwin C. Dietrich, and if incorrect statements have been made over the years, as I believe they have, the reason was most likely to avoid bad blood between people who needed to maintain at least the semblance of a working relationship.

The first thing we must do is establish a production date. Alain Petit was closely involved with Franco during 1974-75: he was the male lead in *Julietta 69* and took another featured role in *Midnight Party*. In his magazine *The Manacoa Files*, Petit recalled, "Towards the end of April [1975], Jess called me to Montpellier where he was filming *Midnight Party* on behalf of Eurociné ... Upon my arrival at the location, I was introduced to Evelyn Scott, Yul Sanders, Olivier Mathot ... Yul Sanders confessed his total confusion: he did not understand the film and had, over the past few days, enacted twice in two very different ways the death of his character. Jess pulled me into a corner with a knowing smile and told me, 'To you, I can say ... I am doing two movies!' I had already guessed ..." ¹ We can safely say, therefore, that *Midnight Party* went before the camera in late April 1975. Note that Petit clearly states *Midnight Party* was made for Eurociné.

Most sources therefore take the simple route and attribute *Midnight Party* to Eurociné and their Belgian associates Brux Inter Films (as indicated by the credits on the French and English-language versions). The most compelling reason to do so is that *Midnight Party* features a host of Eurociné regulars. Pierre Taylou, Olivier Mathot, Claude Boisson (aka Yul Sanders) and Evelyne Scott are heavily featured in the cast, while Eurociné crewmembers Madeleine Quiquandon and Ilona Kunesova appear in background roles. No other production house would employ so many Eurociné actors, much less have members of the Eurociné production team appearing as extras. The scenes featuring Pierre Taylou as a feckless house-husband were even filmed at the Lesoeur family home! Elsewhere in *The Manacoa Files*, however, Franco had a different tale to tell, one which did not refer to Eurociné but instead cited Swiss director/producer Erwin C. Dietrich (with whom Franco worked for three years from 1975 to 1977). When asked how he first met the Swiss sex film mogul, Franco replied: “I met [Dietrich] through Maria Grazia, a Swiss woman who had a production company in Italy, married to a very nice Italian guy. I met them in Rome. They were both jazz fans. They wanted to work with me and we came up with the ideas for *Shining Sex* and *Midnight Party*. We needed a certain sum of money and they didn’t have it all. Maria Grazia had been the girlfriend of a former associate of Dietrich’s and they had stayed friends, so they convinced Dietrich to participate.”² The woman in question, although Franco couldn’t remember her surname, is Maria Grazia Frigerio. She is hard to trace through film credits alone, having worked chiefly in a business and finance capacity: her sole credit on IMDb lists her as production manager on the 1988 Dietrich production *Der Commander*. It is, however, safe to assume that she’s the same woman mentioned by Dietrich in the following quote, from an interview conducted by Chris Alexander in 2016: “To sell our movies in the Italian market, together with my director of photography and associate Peter Baumgartner, I founded the distribution company Prestige Film SRL in Rome. Bruno Mattei was in charge of the dubbing. Jess Franco called our Italian CEO Grazia Frigerio and sold her his new movie *Porno Pop* [*Midnight Party*], with Lina Romay. We brought it onto the big screen, entitled *Heiße Berührungen*, and it was quite a success.”³ Note the important difference here between Franco’s and Dietrich’s accounts:

Franco: “They [Prestige] wanted to work with me and we came up with the ideas for *Shining Sex* and *Midnight Party*.”

Dietrich: “Jess Franco called [Prestige CEO] Grazia Frigerio and sold his new movie [*Midnight Party*].”

In Franco’s version of events he conceived the project with Frigerio/Prestige and then went away and made it, while in Dietrich’s account the film was sold to Prestige as finished. (Legal documentation from the Elite archives points to a deal being struck in September 1975, when the film was being referred to as *Porno Pop*, presumably the shooting title.) One of these statements is incorrect, and I’m inclined to give Dietrich the benefit of the

doubt. Dietrich said that Jess Franco *personally* sold the film to Frigerio, which suggests that he was treating *Midnight Party* as if it were a Manacoa project (Manacoa being Franco’s own production company), something which cannot have pleased Eurociné. Franco’s cavalier approach to the rights for his films would emerge again more problematically in relation to his first official Dietrich production, *Barbed Wire Dolls* (see review).

In January 1976, Dietrich released *Midnight Party* in Switzerland and West Germany as *Heisse Berührungen*. This was its first release anywhere in the world. The poster was headed “Erwin C. Dietrich presents” and “A Cinemec Production for Avis-Ascot Film Rentals” (both of which were Dietrich-owned companies). There was no mention of any other production company, and Lina Romay was the only cast member listed. The Eurociné performers were omitted from *Heisse Berührungen*’s screen credits too: only members of the ‘Franco family’ – Lina Romay, Monica Swinn and Ramón Ardid – were listed. If it’s true that Franco sold the film to Dietrich from under Eurociné’s noses, these extremely partial credits suggest a conscious effort (by Franco?) to conceal the French origins of the project. If *Midnight Party* had genuinely started out as an Italian, Swiss or German production you would expect at least a couple of Italian, Swiss or German actors in the cast. There are none. The performers are either French (Scott, Boisson, Mathot), Belgian (Taylou, Swinn) or Spanish (Franco, Romay, Ardid). Again, this gives credence to Dietrich’s account, not Franco’s, because if the film was simply purchased for German/Swiss distribution there was no need to pad out the cast with bogus German names. This was sometimes done by distributors dishonestly, to imply co-production with another country for tax reasons, but it does not appear to have been Dietrich’s *modus operandi*.

When *Midnight Party* was next released, in Italy in September 1976, much had changed. It was retitled *La coccolona* and the theatrical poster announced distribution by the Dietrich/Frigerio company Prestige Film. The poster also reinstated two Eurociné cast members – Yul Sanders and Olivier Mathot, and the screen credits named Eurociné boss Marius Lesoeur as production manager. One imagines that Dietrich and Eurociné had discussed the matter in the period between the German release and the Italian and come to some sort of accommodation. Unfortunately, since the Italian video release of *La coccolona* omits most of the front credits it’s impossible to say whether Eurociné were actually mentioned on the print (they were not credited on the poster). It’s also significant that Franco’s directorial pseudonym on *La coccolona* was ‘Roland Marceignac’, a name he’d used only once before, on the 1973 Eurociné production *Kiss Me Killer*. Franco’s pseudonym for the scriptwriting credit was ‘Roland Bourriquet’, a credit he never used again (it’s actually the real name of Bernard-Roland [sic], a French-born TV director working in Italy). Coupled with the choice of Gerard Brissaud for the camera credit, this gives the Italian release a distinctly French patina. (Brissaud was a genuine French cinematographer whose name Franco sometimes used instead of his own to disguise the ‘one man band’ nature of his

productions; he 'appears' extensively on Franco's productions for the Paris-based companies Eurociné and Comptoir Français du Film Production.)

Finally, the film was granted a visa for release in France in January 1977 (as *Midnight Party*). Eurociné released it in June of that year, two years after shooting had ended. One could speculate that Eurociné had problems accessing the negative, or were simply having cash-flow problems that delayed the release, but it's striking that a film evidently made with their involvement should have been released in Germany and Italy long before it came out in France. One thing we can safely assume, however, is that the root of the problem was Franco's chaotic and reckless approach to the sale of international film rights, a factor that would lead to increasing problems throughout 1975 and into 1976.

As a footnote to all this shenanigans, the 1983 Spanish release of *Midnight Party* (titled *Lady Porno*) claimed to be a Spanish-Belgian co-production between Titanic Films and Belfilm! Titanic also produced *Les petites sauvages* (1982) directed by Belgian actor Roger Dardon, which was a co-production with – surprise surprise – Eurociné and Belfilm. The latter company turns up on the credits for the Eurociné super-production *Fall of the Eagles* (1988) and is thus probably some kind of Eurociné satellite company. The directing credit on *Lady Porno* goes to 'Tawer Nero' aka Julio Pérez Tabernero, a Spaniard who has been given credit for more films than he actually directed. (Tabernero also used the pseudonym 'Tawer Nero' when he acted in the 1980 Spanish sex film *Consultorio sociológico*.) A figure around whom much misinformation swirls, Tabernero is rumoured to have bought films that had no Spanish input, registered them as Spanish co-productions, pocketed the subsidies and released them in Spain, which is why *Midnight Party* (as *Lady Porno*) is listed as a Spanish-Belgian co-production. Tabernero would also lay claim to another Jess Franco film around the same time (see *The Cannibals*).

Review: *Midnight Party* isn't quite as exciting as its production backstory, but it's nevertheless amusing and outrageous, and if at times it runs out of steam and idles along in third gear, there's always a bizarre or amusing sequence just around the corner. It delivers a few shocks too, as it ricochets up and down the dramatic scale between comedy and brutal crime drama, slipping scenes of rape and torture into what is basically a light-hearted runaround.

Franco opens the proceedings with a drawn-out scene that's either box office suicide or languid cheeky fun, depending on your susceptibility to Lina Romay and your ability to withstand static shots of someone talking to camera. Personally I go for the latter; Romay is funny and playful when telling us about her porno career-plans, and boasts, "I'm the star of this little story and I'll do my best to excite you!". In an amusing nod to Eurociné's taste for multiple retitlings, she declares, "Eurociné presents Lina Romay, in..." without adding the specific title; a wise move, as the film has had a fair few of them over the years. (Interestingly, given the debate over ownership explored in the production notes above, this proprietary

line does not appear in the German or Italian dub of the film: it appears only in Eurociné's French and English-language versions.)

As the story unfolds, we learn more about the life of this coquettish young minx. There's a touch of Seventies men's mag satire in the character of Pierre, Sylvia's lazy, good-for-nothing house-husband, who lounges around complaining that he isn't given enough money to buy the groceries. The joke, however, is double-edged: while the initial humour centres on the male being weak and emasculated, the realisation quickly dawns that he's a parody of the whinging housewife, turning household chores into a big deal, demanding spending money from a hard-working 'husband', and then neglecting the 'duties' of the marital bed: "Oh darling, how sexy you look in black socks" says Sylvia. "Oh no, not now, you women only think of that," Pierre groans. If you want to get serious, the role-reversal is being used simply to pursue a fairly normative sitcom vision of married women as moaning, money-wasting frumps who don't know how to satisfy their hubbies. But why bother? The scenes are really only there to showcase Pierre Taylou's comic capabilities, and were probably conceived over a liquid lunch before being shot that same afternoon.

Frivolous it may be, but like a drunkard after too many cocktails *Midnight Party* can turn nasty at the drop of a paper hat. A torture scene has Radeck's lackeys, played with relish by Monica Swinn and Ramón Ardid, trying to extract a confession from Sylvia by slapping her around. Meanwhile, Franco himself, playing Radeck, jiggles a huge knife beneath her toes (something he describes as "Chinese torture"). It's typical of Franco's thriller-comedies (*Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* the previous year; *Ópalo de fuego* three years later) that jocular pastiche can suddenly give way to shocking sadism, and then just as quickly revert to laughs. Franco is drawn to tone-collages, stories in which horror, frivolity and genre pastiche collide. Because of the sadistic elements, some would argue this is the height of irresponsibility, and those who find violence against women a major issue in exploitation cinema will heartily concur. In Franco's world, however, I would argue that such whiplash shifts of tone and emphasis stem from a dreamlike sensibility, in which categories and moods shift unpredictably. Franco is first and foremost an oneiric filmmaker, and it is, after all, quite common to have dreams in which the horrific, the banal and the absurd collide.

Of course, given that the film was made up pretty much on the spot, *Midnight Party* has some serious pacing issues. There simply isn't enough story to go around. On three separate occasions Sylvia explains the plot so far, to three different lovers, and no amount of sexy insouciance from Romay can hide the blatant repetition. It's just as well that Franco's ramshackle spontaneity sends the humour bouncing unpredictably from refined and ironic to crude and farcical (viewers may think they've stumbled into a Monty Python episode when a housemaid answers the door to a visiting detective and declares, "I'm afraid you've made a mistake. This is Mr. Scrotum's house.") While this is really just a bit of fun compared to the weird and unsettling highlights of Franco's output, it's still cut from a cloth that you can only get from him, and is therefore

catnip to a suitably attuned audience. Outsiders or newcomers, on the other hand, may find the chuckling of aficionados a tad over-indulgent.

Franco on screen: Playing a nasty piece of work called Radeck (always a troublemaker's name in Franco's movies), the director himself serves up the film's most startling dramatic transgression when, after telephoning the police, he turns to the camera and says, "Do you believe me to be a secret agent? But that's not my thing at all! My actual profession is being an actor, and after this scene is over I'll be out of work!"

Music: *Midnight Party* opens with a rinky-dink bar-room piano melody first used in *Vampiresas 1930*, which would later turn up repeatedly in Franco's 1980s films. Sylvia's rock-star lover Nicholas, played by Alain Petit, sings a song with the stirring title "La vie est une merde"; it was created by Petit himself and turns up in two different forms in different versions of *Midnight Party*, as either a boisterous rock number or a depressive blues trudge. It was eventually added to the score of *Kiss Me Killer* (exactly when is unknown, although the film itself was shot in 1973), and reappeared in *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* (1982). Generally, though, *Midnight Party* has only a patchwork score with no real focus or identity of its own, an approach that would come to dominate Franco's films as his budgets became smaller. At times the music cues actually sabotage or ignore the onscreen cavorting, especially during a dance routine Romay performs to Alain Petit's onscreen rock band; perversely, Franco replaces the uptempo live sound with a droopy mid-tempo jazz number.

Locations: We're back at La Grande-Motte in the Languedoc region of southern France, as seen in 1974's *Lorna... the Exorcist*. Alain Petit recalls that scenes were also shot at Le Grau-du-Roi, just a few miles further down the coast. The bar scenes were filmed at a venue called The Colt Saloon, nowadays trading as The Mac Coy Saloon at 285 Rue Hélène Boucher in Mauguio, near Montpellier. The material involving Pierre Taylou and Lina Romay was shot at the country home of Eurociné boss Marius Lesoeur, in Soisy-sur-Ecole, France. This house – the Eurociné 'studio' essentially – can be seen in many other Eurociné productions, including Franco's *Eugenie* aka *Eugenie De Sade* (1970), *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973) and *Kiss Me Killer* (1973). The fact that it also turned up in Franco's *Nightmares Come at Night* (1969) – which was *not* a Eurociné production – shows that Franco had the sheer gall to purloin shots for a rival production while shooting in Lesoeur's own home!

Connections: Romay's direct address to camera at the start of the film (and Franco's similar scene later) echoes the previous year's *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*, which began with Romay and Pamela Stanford speaking to the audience. This breaking of the fourth wall, emphasising the reality behind the fiction, is a natural outgrowth of the 'you are here' fantasy in porn, in which artifice is stripped away to create the illusion of proximity: it becomes more and more prevalent in the video projects of the early 2000s.

French theatrical release: *Midnight Party* played in Paris for

two weeks from 7 December 1977, amassing ticket sales of 6958: roughly half as many as its 'twin' production *Shining Sex* which also played Paris for a fortnight in 1977.

Other versions: Much has been made of the film's multi-headed life in various European variant editions, with the suggestion sometimes raised that it turns into either a comedy or a straightforward drama in the dubbing. Well, if there's a straightforward dramatic version out there, I haven't seen it: all versions I've seen are essentially frivolous comedy dramas with ironic acting, absurd situations and quippy, off-the-cuff acting. For instance, in *Lady Porno*, the Spanish variant, a sex scene is scored comedically to speeded up bar-room piano, whilst a scene in which Sylvia awakes to find Sanders and Scott murdered, then bangs her head as she runs down the stairs (present in all extant versions of the film), concludes with Romay making comedy cross-eyes to camera as she falls unconscious. Whichever version you happen to bump into, the film is just a knockabout bit of nonsense with a greater or lesser amount of softcore sex. Although the original French title is *La partouze de minuit* (or 'The Midnight Orgy') the onscreen translation favoured by Eurociné was *Midnight Party*.

In the French provinces the film played under the variant title *Minuit partouze*: Eurociné evidently believed that Parisians would make sense of the English-language title, but asked distributors in the provinces to advertise the film under the direct French translation. (Poster artwork for a *Minuit partouze* has not surfaced, so it's possible that this title was used in listings and newspaper adverts only.)

Finally, buyer beware: an American VHS release on the Private Screenings video label, which claims on the box to be Franco's *Midnight Party*, is actually the softcore version of Max Pécas's *Luxure* (1975).

SHINING SEX

(Export title)

France & Belgium, 1975

French visa no: 45669

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Shining Sex (FR)

Het meisje met de glanzende sex (BEL-Dutch)

The girl with the shining sex

Alternative titles

Shining Sex la fille au sexe brillant (FR retitling)

Shining sex, the girl with the shining sex

Piaceri erotici di una signora-bene (IT theatrical)

Erotic pleasures of a fine lady

Shining Sex [sic] (FR video cover)
La fille au sexe brillant (FR pressbook/pre-release title)
Alpha (shooting title)
Le sexe brillant (BEL alt. theatrical)
 source: news listing in *Sex Stars System*
Shining Sex [sic] (Pariscopie listing title)

Production companies

Eurociné (Paris)
Brux Inter Films (Brussels)

Distribution companies

Eurociné (Paris)
Deco Films (Belgium)

Timeline

Shooting date	April	1975
Brux	12 July	1976
Turn	21 August	1976
Florence	25 November	1976
French visa issued	16 December	1976
French provinces	01 June	1977
Paris	08 June	1977

Theatrical running time

France (CNC – ‘soft’ version)	69m
France (Pariscopie listings)	90m
France (quoted on promotional artwork)	80m

Video & DVD running times (converted)

French video	84m58s
Japanese ‘Toei Video’ release	109m09s
Spanish TV version	105m21s

director: **Jess Franco** [as ‘Dan L. Simon’]. writers: Pierre Claude Garnier, A.L. Mariaux [actually **Jess Franco**]. producer: **Marius Lesoeur**. director of photography: Gerard Brissaud [actually **Jess Franco**]. camera operators: **Jess Franco**, **Ramón Ardid**. music: **Daniel J. White**, published by Carrousel. continuity: **Nicole Guettard** [as ‘Nadine Foncart’]. assistant director: ‘Pierre Catesson’ [in this case probably **Gerald Cazal**]. second assistant director: **Madeleine Quiquandon**. editor: Josiane Belair [actually **Jess Franco**].

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Cynthia, a stripper). **Evelyne Scott** [Evelyne Deher] (Alpha). **Ramón Ardid** (Andros, Alpha’s slave). **Jess Franco** (Doctor or Professor Seward, a psychiatrist). **Monica Swinn** (Madame Pécame/Pican, a mystic). **Olivier Mathot** (Elmos Kallman, a biologist and researcher of the paranormal). Uncredited: **Gerald Cazal** (Boris, Seward’s manservant). **Nicole Guettard** (woman who passes message to Cynthia). **Madeleine Quiquandon** (woman wearing turtleneck sweater in audience).

Notes: 1) Pierre Taylou and Yul Sanders are credited but do not appear. 2) ‘Dan Simon’ was a pseudonym also used by Daniel Lesoeur for directing the short film *Caroline mannequin nu* (1971), and for production duties on Franco’s big budget Eurociné productions of the late 1980s.

Synopsis: *Cynthia, a vivacious young stripper, is invited back to a hotel to entertain a haughty older woman and her trendy young male friend. Once there, she is drawn into a strange sexual situation that ends with her being smeared with a glistening unguent. The substance enables the older woman – named Alpha, a being from another dimension – to control Cynthia’s actions. Cynthia finds herself powerless to resist as she is sent out to kill those whom Alpha believes possess arcane knowledge that could be dangerous to her; Madame Pécame, a medium, Kallman, a scientist, and Dr. Seward, a psychic...*

Production notes: Though made simultaneously with *Midnight Party*, *Shining Sex* could not be more different in style, and one can only imagine how puzzling the experience of shooting these two films must have been for the actors who featured in both. As Alain Petit recalled, “Yul Sanders confessed his total confusion: he did not understand the film and had, over the past few days, enacted twice in two very different ways the death of his character.”¹ Fascinating as this story is, coming from an unimpeachable source, it’s worth noting that ‘Yul Sanders’ – real name Claude Boisson – does not in fact appear in *Shining Sex*, so either Franco dropped the footage from the final cut or else he squirrelled it away for an unknown project that never saw the light of day. Alternatively, perhaps Boisson realised what Franco was up to and complained to Eurociné? It’s striking that both he and Pierre Taylou, frequent Eurociné actors, are credited onscreen for *Shining Sex* but neither of them appear. Maybe they insisted, quite reasonably, that their scenes should not be used if they were not being paid for a second film. So if *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex* were being made at the same time, which was the ‘official’ film and which was the clandestine one? I asked Monica Swinn, one of the small handful of people who knew what Franco was up to at the time: “The secret film was *Shining Sex*.”²

Review: This mesmerising journey into sexual alienation should be considered one of Jess Franco’s most radical and personal works. Originally announced to the press as ‘Alpha’ (after its otherworldly villainess) it’s a weird narcotic classic, sharing a few plot ideas with *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit* but striking out on its own with some extraordinary moods and sensations. Produced very rapidly, it’s an inspired improvisation rather than a structured narrative, dependent upon spontaneous camerawork and strong performances. Franco is flying free here, indulging his predilection for the avant-garde. As Franco’s friend and collaborator Alain Petit explained to film historian Francesco Cesari, “On *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*, Jess was some kind of Mr. Tambourine Man. He was the one and only cinematographer, he chose the lighting, everything was under his control. From time to time,

when Jess was playing a part, Ramón Ardid [Lina Romay's husband at the time] was the cinematographer, he was also the one who put the lighting in place, put the negative film in the camera ... I would say Jess took between ten to fifteen days to complete both *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex*."³

Shining Sex is essentially a more carnal version of Franco's 1965 horror film *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, in which a malevolent female uses mind control to force a pretty young nightclub performer to commit murders. The difference this time is that traditional horror imagery has been swept aside, leaving a series of slow, narcotically extended trance sequences, mainly erotic in nature, ranging from the faintly ominous to the alarmingly dysfunctional. Often wordless, bordering on abstract, minimal in the extreme, *Shining Sex* is hallucinatory in a very different way to Franco's more celebrated work, casting aside the optical tricks of *Venus in Furs* and the cine-referential conceits of *Succubus* and sailing into a mysterious realm between genres, a liminal space bordered by horror, sci-fi, psychedelia and pornography yet beyond the scope of each. Although Alpha is a being from another dimension, there is no attempt, except for Evelyne Scott's glacial performance, to style her as an alien; no bat ears or white contact lenses, and no alien technology at her disposal. All that is strange and off-kilter comes from the acting, and the way Franco dwells upon each scene, riffing on the weirdness he's creating, drawing it out like a jazz soloist floating away into musical madness. There are no superficial distractions, and the 'story' plays out mostly in plain, functional hotel rooms. The only visual extravagances are Lina Romay's trouser-suit (a zip-up-the-front number in flowing black satin with abstract geometric silver squares, like a Rothko recoloured by Jeff Koons), and the Grande-Motte seafront location, with its distinctive pyramidal architecture. It's as if Franco were trying to strip away everything superfluous in search of the nucleus of his talent. *Shining Sex* is like a laboratory experiment to isolate 'the Franco bug', in which impurities are boiled away, extraneous radiation screened out, until what remains can be observed in its purest state – the essence of his cinematic spirit. In *Shining Sex* he plays with the idea that this 'Franco bug' is an entity from another dimension; something truly 'other', like an alien spore. 'Look what I've found', he seems to be saying, 'What is it? How did I catch it?'

For Franco, lust is a doubled-edged sword; a delicious escape into a world of pleasure, and a dangerous liability that allows others to manipulate the desiring individual. In Franco, women are often aloof from desire while simultaneously wielding the power of seduction. As the person who feels desire becomes aroused and ensnared, the other remains detached, in control, aware of the wider picture. Franco's male-centered neo-noirs, such as *Downtown*, *Les Ébranlées* and *Pick-Up Girls*, are rife with women who can turn seductive sexiness on and off to suit their plans, while the men are largely dupes, diving into the pool of desire only to find some nefarious transgression perpetrated against them. Desire, for Franco, is a mysterious force, dangerous in its ability to wipe away the contours of our civilised thoughts and feelings,

driving us to its own selfish fulfilment, as if it were some force which floods through the mind like a powerful ocean current, dissolving morality, capsizing the will, and swilling away the loose cargo of identity.

The only cinemas to have screened *Shining Sex* at the time of its release were porno theatres, and yet the film's relentless sexual alienation must have sent punters scurrying out feeling thoroughly disorientated. It's defiantly a sex film, and yet the sex keeps sliding away into weird, unwholesome convulsions, as if arousal had simply carried on mounting in the actors until they reacted with nausea or derangement, like drug addicts suffering an overdose. The first encounter between Cynthia and Alpha is one of the most sustained examples of weird sex ever committed to celluloid, and it's achieved through the confluence of three forces: the spellbinding performances of Lina Romay and Evelyne Scott, Franco's camerawork, which draws the viewer inexorably into an attenuated time and space, and Daniel White's extraordinary music.

Narratively speaking, there is very little backstory or context for the characters. All that we learn about the heroine, Cynthia, is disclosed in the first couple of minutes, when she takes to the stage as "*The charming and delightful Cynthia, direct from Las Vegas [...] in her own creation, 'Shining Sex'*". That, literally, is all we find out about our female lead, unless we count her chatty aside to Alpha and Andros: "*It's a pity you didn't see me in Hamburg. I did a marvellous number with a racehorse – that's superporno, you understand?*" It's seventy minutes before we learn anything about the other-dimensional visitors, and the information is condensed into one scene in which Andros talks to Cynthia. Describing how he came to be Alpha's "*servant, or more like her slave*", he reflects: "*It was a long time ago. The boat that I was travelling on was unexpectedly enveloped in a sudden heavy fog. We all lost consciousness. When we finally woke up we were in a strange unknown place. We had entered another dimension ... It appeared to us like another corner of the Earth.*" Alpha is described simply as a denizen of that other place, and she's using Cynthia to murder those who suspect the existence of her kind. Like one of the dimension-hopping characters from the Black Lodge in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, Alpha seems drawn to sex and human lust, both as a means to achieve her aims and for its own sake. Perhaps it's a form of stimulation unavailable or massively diluted in Alpha's realm? When she makes love with Cynthia she seems to find the experience overwhelming, akin to a drug overdose...

Science appears in *Shining Sex* in a mutant form, trailing loose ends of the irrational. Dr. Seward, played by Franco himself, is a metaphysician who seems fully cognisant of the dimension from which Alpha originates (he informs his manservant that the mysterious Alpha is, "*a being who belongs to another dimension. It has come among us to seek information about our habits*"). And unless the editing is intended to convey a view from his hotel window that beggars belief he also seems to have psychic vision, being able to 'watch' Cynthia as she walks into the countryside under Alpha's

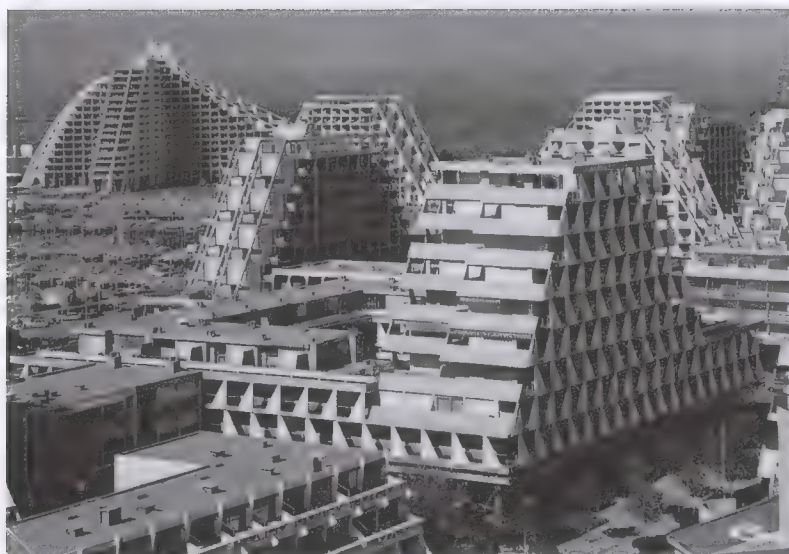


TOP: Cynthia (Lina Romay, centre) seduces the mystic Madame Pecame (Monica Swinn).
 BOTTOM: Andros (Ramón Ardido), sex slave to an alien; Cynthia pleasures the sinister Alpha (Evelyn Scott).









TOP LEFT: La Grande-Motte in the South of France.



TOP RIGHT: Dr. Seward (Franco) and his assistant Boris (played by Franco's real life assistant during this period, Gerald Cazal) care for Cynthia (Romy).

MAIN PICTURE: Alpha surveys the drugged and helpless Cynthia before sending her on a murderous mission.



control. Devoted to exploring the unknown, he is also prone to experiences bordering on the Jainist belief that inanimate objects possess souls: "A little while back I had the impression that all the ~~objects in the clinic~~ had an existence of their own." Franco's Dr. Seward is therefore a metaphysician first and foremost, as befits a film with one foot in the paranormal. Then there's Cynthia's second victim, Kallman, ostensibly a biologist, who according to Dr. Seward is actually researching "other dimensions" (just wait until the funding body finds out). Kallman's studies lead him away from the scientific rationalism of Europe and, symbolically, into the Dark Continent of the Occult: as Cynthia stalks him during a coastal boat trip (an oneirically prolonged sequence breathtaking in its suspension of narrative time), Seward's voice-over proclaims, "She is travelling through the portals of space. She has arrived at an unknown shore, far away. Perhaps it's Africa."

The void, stillness, absence: these are constant factors in Franco's cinema. His best work frequently draws towards absolute emptiness. When the occultist Madame Pécame realises that Cynthia has been sent by Alpha to destroy her, she asks, "What led you to me?". Cynthia replies, "A voice. The voice of silence." In many horror films such metaphysical pronouncements would seem at best arch, if not pretentious. Here, it feels entirely justified: an echo of the total strangeness permeating the project. Almost beyond the power of words, *Shining Sex* draws its weird energy from elastic absences, suspended moments of time, in which the 'voice of silence' ceases to be a pseudo-mystical affectation and becomes a meditative reality. Dream and reality, metaphor and geography, science and mysticism, sex and metaphysics, all swirl around in a defocussed miasma in which boundaries dissolve into air. This is Franco's cinema unbound; *Shining Sex* brims with the delirious absinthe of his vision.

Franco on screen: Franco plays Dr. Seward, a character who, though unable to intervene, possesses psychic awareness of Cynthia's proximity and state of mind (a good metaphor for the way that writers sometimes feel that their creations are detached from their conscious control). With his possession of arcane or obscure knowledge, Seward recalls two other characters played onscreen by Franco: Attila Tanner in *Eugenie* (a sleuth with a strangely intimate awareness of the titular murderess and her father) and Dr. Roberts in *Female Vampire* (a coroner with unusual insights into the modus operandi of a sex vampire).

Music: Despite the daunting minimalism of *Shining Sex*, one tool in Franco's creative arsenal that cannot be stripped away is music. Daniel White's themes for *Shining Sex* are among the most entrancing and otherworldly of his career. One piece in particular stands out. It appears during Cynthia's first sexual encounter with Alpha, and is built around a seductive yet implacable acoustic bass, twinkling electric piano and eerie, harmonically displaced synthesiser. Supple and gentle, yet grave and precise, it builds an unforgettably eerie mood that lingers in the mind long after the film has ended ... There's fun to be had too with a thuddingly simplistic rock drum solo, heard during the boat trip, which

aims for an African tribal feel but sounds more like an extended Hawkwind workout. One piece, heard prominently during the Madame Pécame episode, is an alternative take of "Fantômes chéris" which appears on the Daniel White library music LP *Mystère Bleuté* (literally 'Bluish Mystery'), released by Montparnasse 2000 in 1976. This variant take (which has more percussion than the album version) suggests that White recorded music during the *Mystère Bleuté* sessions which he kept aside purely for Franco.

Locations: *Shining Sex* is shot in and around La Grande-Motte's imposing waterfront hotel, previously seen in *Lorna... the Exorcist* (and also in the back-to-back *Midnight Party*). The open-plan interior space where Cynthia is incarcerated by Alpha is actually the hotel solarium. Cynthia's meeting with Madame Pécame takes place at the medieval walled city of Aigues-Mortes, about fifteen kilometres from La Grande Motte. Her metaphysical boat ride is on the Tiki paddle-steamer (now the Tiki III) which runs to this day from the Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer region of the Camargue. The journey offers tourists a trip into the mouth of the Petit-Rhône delta, with the waterways forming a natural haven for wildlife and offering beautiful vistas of the surrounding countryside. Please note: owing to the fragility of time and space in the region, holidays are at your own risk. Terms and conditions apply.

Connections: The notion of desire as an organism from outer space, or some kind of metaphysical visitation from another plane, has currency in the writings of William Burroughs – see *Naked Lunch* (1959), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964) – while the idea of uncontrollable lust released by contact with a chemical agent can be found in Charles Platt's controversial novel *The Gas* (1968), in which an accident at a germ-warfare lab allows an aphrodisiac vapour to escape across southern England, leading men, women, and children to act out their most twisted sexual obsessions. In *Shining Sex*, Alpha's manservant reveals that he was a sailor whose boat passed through a cloud of fog and emerged in another dimension: James Herbert's novel *The Fog* (1975) tells of a mysterious cloud that stimulates brutal sexualised violence in those who enter it ... There are gossamer threads of Francoesque mood and style here which stretch back to *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit* and *Lorna... the Exorcist*, and forward to such masterful later films as *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray*, *Macumba Sexual* and *Mil sexos tiene la noche*. Each plays with an artful suspension of narrative time, with sex as the lubricant that allows characters to slip between the fibres of reality and into another space ... 'Dr. Seward' is back, or an iteration of him, following his appearances in *Count Dracula*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* ... 'Kallman', one may recall, is the name of another of Franco's doomed scientists (who is also hunted by a hypnotised female assassin) in *The Diabolical Dr. Z* ... *Shining Sex* sees the first use of a cost-cutting trick Franco would return to many times in the next ten years; shots of Romy performing a risqué strip number against the wall of a hotel bedroom, intercut with scenes shot in a club with seated patrons apparently watching and applauding.

The intercutting insists upon the illusion of shared space, in an almost arrogant display of filmmaking *cojones*. And you know what? It works ... Made back-to-back with *Midnight Party*, *Shining Sex* features Romay wearing the same costumes from that film, with the freshly shaved vagina first seen in *Julietta 69*. Both *Midnight Party* and *Shining Sex* feature erotic scenes taking place in the same hotel room, with distinctive green-patterned wallpaper.

French theatrical release: In all likelihood there were two different French theatrical releases of this film. The Centre national du cinéma (CNC) archives indicate that it was only 69m long when a visa was first issued in December 1976, at which point the film was called *Shining Sex*. However, a change of title to *Shining Sex la fille au sexe brillant* was registered on 2 December 1977, and it was this version that appeared on French videocassette in the early 1980s, running approximately 85m. It would seem that the version which played in Paris in June 1977 was the shorter version, with the longer version released later. (To complicate matters, the French trade magazine *Le Film Français* indicates that *Shining Sex* played for two weeks in Paris in June 1977, with a respectable 13,095 tickets sold. However, in the June 1977 issue of *Pariscopes* (the Parisian listings magazine) the running time was listed as 90m: longer than the version released on videotape! (It's possible of course that the *Pariscopes* information was incorrect.) An alternative explanation for the 69m version is that when the visa was first applied for, Eurociné were planning a softcore (therefore shorter) release only; perhaps their plans changed later on?

Other versions: The Japanese VHS release from Toei Video includes numerous scenes missing from the French version. Although heavily censored with digital fogging (a major liability in a film so explicit), on the plus side it has English dialogue and much better picture quality. The extra material is as follows:

1. A scene lasting 5m15s in which Cynthia wakes up alone in the hotel room where she'd spent the night with Alpha. She goes to the window and looks out. Cut to Alpha caressing Andros as they sit on the hotel verandah. Cynthia walks outside and greets them, then reclines on a sofa. Alpha commences rubbing the mysterious unguent on Cynthia's body.
2. An additional music cue for the scene in which Alpha follows Cynthia into the hotel room, has sex with her, and calls Andros to join in.
3. 5m of extra material leading up to Cynthia's encounter with Madame Pécame: Alpha stands by the hotel window; Andros drives Cynthia to Madame Pécame's castle where he drops her off; Cynthia walks around the building then enters via a stone stairway; Madame Pécame walks slowly around her apartment.
4. Two brief shots following the flagellation scene, lasting a total of 26 seconds: one of Cynthia's distressed face in close-up, and another of the nude Alpha entering her bedroom and lying down.
5. The riverboat sequence, and Cynthia's 'haunting' of Kallman

is extended by 8m39s. We see Kallman reading in his hut; he hears his name being called and goes outside with a gun to investigate, before returning to his room where he is seduced and then killed by Cynthia.

6. The final shot is 25s longer. The French cut ends on a close-up of Cynthia's 'shining sex'; the Japanese pulls back to show her entire body.

Meanwhile the French version features approximately three and a half minutes missing from the Japanese cut:

1. A cunnilingus scene lasting 1m40s, presumably removed from the Japanese edit because the digital fogging required would have resulted in two minutes of total pixellation!
2. Some explicit close-ups of Andros's penis in Cynthia's vagina.
3. 38s of Andros performing cunnilingus on Cynthia, along with a 10s close-up of Cynthia's shaved pussy soon afterwards.
4. Close-ups of Andros manipulating Alpha's pussy, and close-ups of penetration, totalling approximately 50s. The explicit footage begins with a sound glitch, and the woman is not wearing nail varnish, whereas Evelynne Scott is wearing dark nail polish. These shots were therefore edited in later, probably with different performers.

RAZZIA SUR LE PLAISIR

translation: *Racket on Pleasure*

INCLUDES MATERIAL DIRECTED BY FRANCO

France 1975-76

French visa no: 46822

Alternative titles

Surbous porno (re-edited FR theatrical) *Porno Surprise Parties*

Des filles dans une cage dorée (FR theatrical re-release)

Girls in a Golden Cage

Une cage d'orée (FR re-release/FR video onscreen title)

Girls in a Golden Cage (English-language export title)

Carcel dorada (SP video) *Golden Prison*

Vizio in bocca (IT theatrical) *Vice in the Mouth*

Racket on Pleasure (ENG-language export title)

La cage aux filles (FR press sheet)

Unconfirmed titles

Dans la cage des fauves (unknown) *In the Cage of the Wild Beasts*

Razzia sur le sexe (unknown) *Racket on Sex*

Production company

Eurociné

Timeline

Shooting date	months unknown	1975-76
Franco's material added	circa April	1976
Hardcore version at Cannes	May	1976
French visa number issued	14 March	1977
France	01 June	1977

theatrical running time

France	76m
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director: Marius Lesoeur [as A.M.F. Frank aka Adolf M. Frank], with uncredited help from **Jess Franco**. **writer:** Marius Lesoeur [as H.L. Rostaine]. **director of photography:** Raymond Heil. **camera operator:** Alain Hardy. **music:** Daniel J. White. **sound:** Jacques Orth, Claude Panier. **editor:** Claude Gros. **assistant director:** Michel Charrel. **continuity:** Ilona Kunesova. **production manager:** Daniel Lesoeur. Eastmancolor.

Cast: Roger Darton (Mr. Winter). Evelyne Scott (Marie Lebeuf, aka Marina Maillot). Alice Arno (Winter's glamorous accomplice). Jess Franco (Mr. Caramélis, buyer of illicit porn). Ronald Weiss (bearded man watching girl being flogged in cage). Joëlle Le Quément [as 'Joelle Lyons'] (bearded man's partner). Lik Cheung (Co Lee). Florentina [as Florentina Fuga] (Claudie). René Gaillard (mobster client at Hong Kong cabaret). Gillian Gill [as 'Gillian Pascuale'] (opium smoker). Jacques Marbeuf (Victor, grey-haired man who rapes Marina). Monica Swinn [as 'Monica Stevens'] (barmaid). Pierre Taylou (Chief Inspector/male model at chateau). Daniel J. White (police commissioner). Daniel Darnault (client at the cabaret). Daniel Lesoeur (client at the bar). Rod Sullivan (Slim). Bernard Launois [as 'Bob Gary'] (Inspector Julien). Marlène Myller (Winter's daughter). Gilliane Pascual (opium smoker). Pamela Stanford (curly-haired girl with male model at chateau). Johnny Wessler (one of Slim's mobsters). Jean-Pierre Bouyxou. Madame Caillard. Danielle Chennevière. Linda Norman. Gilbert Servien. Bruce Tsing. Wang Chan. Cyril Val. From clips added later: Jean-Michel Dhermay (Inspector Baudoin). Rod Sullivan (Slim). Stan Dillington (one of Slim's men). Victor Israel (another of Slim's men). Jean-Pierre Delamour and Gilda Arancio (couple). Alix Mahieux and Chantal Broquet (actors in the film watched by Caramélis). Bernard Launois.

Synopsis (from Eurociné's press-sheet for the film): *In Hong Kong, Mister Winter is at the centre of prostitution and pleasures. The women who do not follow his orders are locked in a golden cage and spanked in the presence of Mister Winter and his invited guests at special parties. But the police and the gangsters want to kill him; so Mister Winter plans his escape. He goes to Paris and sets up a fantastic pleasure club including an amazing torture chamber in which he puts those girls who resist him. The Paris police are alerted. They surround the club and arrest all the gangsters.*

Review: A dog's dinner of disconnected scenes, typical of Eurociné's more 'casual' confections, *Razzia sur le plaisir* (aka *Une cage d'orée*) was 'directed' by company majordomo Marius Lesoeur under the pseudonym A.M. Frank. (Apparently the 'A' stood for 'Adolf'!). When he got into difficulties on the project he asked Franco to step in and shoot a few scenes, hence its inclusion here. Jess also acts in the film, although it's not clear whether he agreed to do so before or after consenting to supervise parts of the filming. Whatever the precise arrangement, the result is an object lesson in the artistic gulf that lies between a genuine Franco project and the work of his business associates. While the same sorts of elements are included – sex trafficking, sinister criminals, bondage, erotic abuse – there is no fluidity, no vision, no mania. The style of the film is detached to the point of concussion, while the nonsensical narrative is bandaged up willy-nilly with digressions pulled from several other Eurociné movies, including *Pigalle carrefour des illusions* (Pierre Chevalier, 1971), *Une vierge pour St. Tropez* (Georges Friedland, 1974), and *Des Hommes de joie* (Pierre Chevalier, 1974). The French critic Christophe Bier was right to compare the result to the 'exquisite corpse' game so beloved of the Surrealists; like a drawing of a man with a goldfish's head and a hairbrush for legs, it stands before us and, despite all evidence to the contrary, soberly asserts a singular identity.

Much of the viewing pleasure one can have with a film like this is, frankly, at the film's expense. One's first impulse is to laugh, but when you look at Eurociné's history, and the ability of the Lesoeurs to keep on making money with these absurd productions, you have to admit that they're just as entitled to laugh back. What mattered to them was to keep making pictures: polish, panache, style and craftsmanship were just stumbling blocks. Franco, although he often shot carelessly at high speed, was the only cinematic stylist the Lesoeurs ever worked with; the others (Pierre Chevalier, Patrice Rhomm, Georges Friedland, et al) were just there to get the job done. Few of Eurociné's non-Franco films convey any passion for the medium; the aim seems to have been to bang together just enough cinematic timber to call the result a movie, and then work tirelessly to promote it at the film markets. According to director Gilbert Roussel, who made *Les aventures galantes de Zorro* (1972) and *Les filles du Golden Saloon* (1975) for Eurociné, Marius Lesoeur was an unstoppable dynamo at Cannes and MIFED, selling the films to even the most obscure markets: "His stand was always crowded with people... He would introduce me to a guy who bought for the Fiji Islands: 'The director of Zorro, you see! He is in Cannes, let me introduce you!'"¹

Blithely unempathic, and stubbornly unaesthetic, these films are fascinating precisely because they come from such a strange, impassive place, disengaged from any desire for emotional power or cinematic elegance. Even the sex is hardly ever erotic; it usually boils down to a handful of guys mauling a woman in a storage cellar or a cluttered garage, with mise-en-scène limited to clearing enough space for a mattress. And in case that sounds sleazy and disturbing, remember that the acting is woefully unconvincing

and the choreography of chaos incredibly tired and dispassionate. Unlike the XXX roughies which oozed out of the USA in the 1970s, there's no real sense of human darkness bubbling through the murk. Even grubby realism needs artistry of a sort, or if not then at least some fire in the belly of the creator.

The most likely 'Francoesque' sequences in *Une cage d'orée* are a zoom-laden strip routine performed by a shapely brunette, which involves much stroking of stockings à la Soledad Miranda in *The Devil Came from Akasava* (1970), and an opium den sequence which offers just a hint of languid disorientation, redolent of a similar sequence in *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964). But since neither scene packs much punch it seems that Jess was keeping his powder dry for his own work. It's amazing that Franco found the time: he shot three sex films for Erwin Dietrich in February/March 1976, and according to cinematographer Peter Baumgartner, he embarked on pre-production for *Jack the Ripper* in May 1976, having just returned from Paris. This suggests a brief window of opportunity during April 1976, in which case Franco must have been hired by Lesoeur to ensure that the film was ready for the Cannes Film Market in May 1976.

Franco on screen: Jess plays Mr. Caramélis, a buyer of illicit pornography with a taste for rape movies featuring girls from Roger Darton's vice ring. Surveying the latest acquisition as she bumps and grinds onstage at Winters' strip club, his hands shake with nervous excitement as he anticipates seeing her suffer. This tiny detail, and the fact that he smokes crumpled cigarettes which look as though they've come from a squashed packet, gives Mr. Caramélis more nuance and detail than anyone else in the film.

Connections: Of all the material drafted in from earlier productions, by far the largest chunk comes from *Pigalle carrefours des illusions* (Pierre Chevalier, 1971), including all the material shot on the streets of Paris and the scenes in which Evelyne Scott arrives in the big city only to be abducted, raped and beaten by gangland thugs. When Mr. Winter (Roger Darton) shows a porno movie to Mr. Caramélis (Franco), the footage they watch is from Pierre Chevalier's *Des Hommes de joie* (made for Eurociné in 1974). The fact that the material features Pierre Taylou is a perfect example of Eurociné's lack of concern for such tiresome notions as detail and consistency: Taylou has already appeared elsewhere in *Une cage d'orée* in the unconnected role of a police inspector investigating Winters' sex trafficking ring! A short scene featuring a blonde doing a sexy cabaret routine is taken from Eurociné's *Une vierge pour St. Tropez* (Georges Friedland, 1974). Friedland's film is a bit of a puzzle, inasmuch as it shares numerous locations with the projects Franco was working on during the 1973-74 Christmas and New Year period, namely *Kiss Me Killer* (a winding house), *The Hot Nights of Linda* (the interior of the Hotel Montiboli) and *Female Vampire* (a low ceilinged cellar with a mosaic wall), not to mention a scene shot in the same room in Marius Lesoeur's home that we saw in Franco's *Midnight Party*. This, plus the presence of Paul Müller and James Harris, and the use of library music cues familiar from Franco's 1972-73 films, can lead to suspicions that Franco

actually directed *Une vierge pour St. Tropez*, though this was not the case. The plot, which centres around a boy-meets-girl romance, just doesn't have the ring of a Franco project. It is possible, however, that *Une vierge pour St. Tropez* was shot by Friedland for Eurociné concurrently with the Franco films, and therefore shared their locations.

Locations: The family home of Marius Lesoeur and his wife was in the Parisian suburb of Soisy-sur-Seine, on the edge of the Forêt de Senart. The Lesoeurs' garage was converted into a studio and scenes for numerous Eurociné productions were filmed there, including *La Marque de Zorro*, *Train special pour Hitler*, *Paris Porno* and *Une cage d'orée*. Some scenes for *Paris Porno* and *Une cage dorée* were filmed there simultaneously.

Other versions: The film was first presented at the 1976 Cannes Film Market as *Razzia sur le plaisir*. However, the French censor slapped an 'X' rating on it, which was not what Lesoeur was hoping for. To solve the problem he shot additional material and grafted in scenes from Pierre Chevalier's *Des hommes de joie*. This version came out in French cinemas in 1977 as *Surbourns porno*. It was then released again in the French provinces as *Des filles dans une cage dorée*, playing Bordeaux in March 1980. The version that made it onto French video in the early 1980s was called *Des filles dans une cage dorée* on the cover, but came up as simply *Une cage dorée* on screen. Puzzlingly, a poster exists which advertises the film under two of these title simultaneously: *Razzia sur le plaisir* and *Surbourns porno*!

BARBED WIRE DOLLS

(USA theatrical)

Switzerland [& Italy], 1975

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Frauengefängnis (SWI GER) *Women's Prison*

Femmes en cage (SWI FR)

Penitenziario femminile per reati sessuali (IT theatrical)

Female Prison for Sexual Offences

Alternative titles

Caged Women (UK theatrical)

El reformatorio de las perdidas (see 'Other versions')

The Reformatory for the Lost

Penitenziario de mujeres por reatos sexuales (poster – country unknown) *Women's Prison for Sexual Atonements*

Penitenciaría femenina de crimes sexuais (BRA theatrical)

Kalteri Nuket (FIN theatrical)

Femmes en cage (SWI theatrical/shooting title) *Caged Women*

Gier hinter Gittern (German shooting title) *Greed Behind Bars*

Dolls Behind Bars (US 42nd Street billboard title)

Meisjes Achter Tralies (NL video) *Girls Behind Bars*

Mujeres enjauladas (title on IT sales agreement) *Caged Women*

English titles

To stratopedo tis diafthoras (GRE) *The Camp of Corruption*

Αποδραση από το νησί των διεστραμμένων (GRE DVD?)

Escape from the Island of Perversion

Woman Caged (PHIL video?)

Production company

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Theatrical distributors

Avis Filmverleih (SW/West Germany)

Burbank International Pictures (Los Angeles)

Miracle Films (London)

Release

Contract: Franco and G.I.F.	02 August	1975
Contract: Franco & Dietrich	12 August	1975
Location shooting in Antibes	18-25 August	1975
Location shooting in Nice	26-30 August	1975
Shooting on sets in Zürich	September	1975
German 18-cert 48174 issued	08 April	1976
Germany	23 April	1976
Reviewed in <i>Sex Stars System</i>	15 July	1976
UK – rejected by the BBFC	25 August	1976
La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland)	17 September	1976
Zürich (Switzerland)	03 October	1976
UK local 'X' certificate issued	14 February	1977
London (UK)	08 April	1977
Portsmouth (UK)	21 May	1977
Fasano (Italy)	28 April	1977
Turin (Italy)	22 June	1977
Miami (USA)	17 February	1978
New York, 42nd Street (USA)	27 October	1978
Brandon, Manitoba (Canada)	24 August	1979
São Paulo (Brazil)	05 May	1980

Theatrical running times

Germany	77m55s
UK	63m43s

Video/DVD/Blu-ray running times (converted where necessary)

UK 'Vipco' PAL VHS version	62m32s
Ascot-Elite	80m59s

director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. An **Elite Film** Production. world sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich). screenplay: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khunne']. script girl: **Connie Grau**. production manager (Switzerland): **Paul Grau**. dialogue synch director:

Peter Baumgartner. editors: **Peter Baumgartner & Marie Louise Buschke**. dialogue: **Christine Lembach**. sound: **Klaus Kunsemüller & Hubertus Schmandtke** [as 'Hubertus Schmandtke']. music: **Daniel J. White & Walter Baumgartner**. music publishers: **Carrousel (Paris) & VIP Musikverlag (Zürich)**. produced in the **Elite Film Studios, Zürich**. scoring: **Avco Film, Berlin**. assistant director: **Gerald Cazal**. laboratory: **Geyer-Werke, Berlin**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Maria da Guerra, prisoner). **Paul Müller** (Carlos Costa aka 'Dr. Moore'). **Monica Swinn** ('The Directress' or 'The Wardress'). **Roger Darton** (His Excellency the Governor). **Ronald Weiss** (older bearded guard). **Martine Stedil** (Bertha Markos [GER: Bertha Contrini], prisoner who killed her brother). **Eric Falk** (Nestor, the head guard). **Peggy Markoff** [as 'Peggy Markhoff'] (Ingrid aka 'Queen Isabella' [GER: 'Cortina']). **Nathalie Mann**. **Denis Torre**. **Ramón Ardid** (José, the younger bearded guard). **Beni Cardoso** (Rosa, deranged prisoner). *Swiss pressbook adds:* **Liliane Sollberger**. **Madelaine Ammann**. *Uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (Maria's father). *American poster adds:* Maryann Stevens. *MF adds:* Andrea Weiss (chief female guard).

Notes: 1) IMDb adds 'Frieda Altstadt' and 'Nathalie Chape'. I suspect these names have been added erroneously because of the prevailing confusion between *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Women Behind Bars* (both of these actors appear in *Women Behind Bars* too). 2) 'Nathalie Chape' must be Nathalie Chappell, probably with the last few letters trimmed by a pan-and-scan transfer. 3) Although Denis Torre is credited onscreen, he does not appear in the finished film.

Synopsis: *Somewhere in South America. Having murdered her father after he tried to molest her, Maria da Guerra is sent to prison on a remote island. The penitentiary's cruel and corrupt regime is maintained by the Directress (a sadistic lesbian) and 'Dr. Moore' (actually an imposter called Carlos Costa who murdered the real Dr. Moore and took his place). With the aid of Nestor, a sadistic prison guard, they love breaking the will of their prisoners. Another guard, José, is less enthusiastic in his duties but he does as he's told. Costa and the Directress subject Maria to a dose of brutal agonising shock treatment before incarcerating her in a cell with three other inmates: Ingrid, a nymphomaniac who masturbates constantly while fantasising that she's the Queen of an island paradise; Rosa, who has been traumatised into childlike passivity by a spell of enforced starvation; and Bertha Marcos, imprisoned because she murdered her brother in a fit of sexual jealousy. Of these, only Bertha has clung to sanity. The prison's male Governor lives offsite, but he too is corrupt: he occasionally visits the prison but only to watch girls, including a prisoner called Juliette Moreau, being raped and abused by Nestor. Maria is once again electro-tortured, then anally raped with a stick by Nestor; realising she's likely to die in this hellhole, she plots to escape. Together with Bertha and Rosa, she seduces Costa and then stabs him with a pair of scissors. The three women then scale the walls and escape. In the jungle they are*

hunted down by Nestor and a female guard. Nestor rapes Bertha but he's shot by José, whose misgivings have finally boiled over. Rosa attacks and kills the female guard, and then makes her way with Maria to the Governor's house. To their horror, they are greeted by the Governor, the Directress and Costa. The Directress shoots the escapees, but as the story concludes Bertha and José remain at large...

Jess Franco: "After finishing [*Midnight Party*], Dietrich wanted to meet me because he wanted to work with me. So we did *Frauengefängnis* with Dietrich as co-producer. I had a few problems with the Lesœur brothers over that film. They had invested in the movie and owned the French rights. Dietrich was very late in delivering the movie to them because he feared that they would sell the foreign rights before he did. Once the rights were sold, he sent the film to them, thinking that he didn't owe them anything because of the tiny sum invested."¹

Production notes: Come the spring of 1975, Franco was growing restless. He had a long list of projects he wanted to make, but his regular producers were struggling to keep up. Robert de Nesle's Paris-based company, Comptoir Français du Film Production, was in serious financial difficulty: it would bankroll no films at all in 1975, just one in 1976 (a hardcore porn film called *Furies sexuelles* aka *Thoroughly Modern Mary-Magdalene* by Alain Payet), and one more in 1977 (Payet's *Cocktail porno*). Franco's regular producers Eurociné continued to operate, but he needed other options. The reasons for this are only partly ascribable to wanderlust: it seems, judging by what happened next, that Franco's financial position was getting more and more fraught and he badly needed new sources of revenue. His own production venture, Manacoa Films, had failed to gain any traction: *Un silencio de tumba*, made in 1972, didn't find distribution until 1976; *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*, made in 1973, didn't see release until 1978; and three more Manacoa productions – *Relax Baby*, *El misterio del castillo rojo* and *La casa del ahorcado* – were abandoned unfinished. What Franco really needed was a new business associate: a dynamic, financially robust producer with a thirst for lots of new product. The answer to his prayers came in the form of the Swiss director/producer who'd recently picked up *Midnight Party* for German and Italian distribution: Erwin C. Dietrich.

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when Franco and Dietrich first met (see *Midnight Party*), but it must have been before June 1975 because shooting on Dietrich's *Rolls Royce Baby*, a sex film starring Lina Romay, was already finished by then. Bearing in mind the speed at which both men worked, it's likely that they met in either late April or May 1975, with Romay signing up for *Rolls Royce Baby* immediately afterwards. Also present when Franco and Dietrich first met was Italian producer Mario Alabiso, who would get himself involved with Franco a few months later on a highly problematic and ultimately aborted project (see *Mandinga*).

Born in Switzerland in 1930, Dietrich was a major player in the world of cine-erotica. During the 1970s his softcore sex films were widely distributed across Europe, and they were often

highly lucrative, which meant he had plenty of capital to sink into new projects. He'd begun as a producer in the late 1950s with the romantic drama *Der König der Bernina* in 1957, and had been steadily building up his business portfolio ever since. With *Hinterhöfe der Liebe* and *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst* (both 1968), he started writing and directing his own movies, all the while running a succession of independent film companies – from Urania Filmproduktion (founded in 1957) to Prestige Film (founded in 1970) to VIP (founded in 1971) to the Swiss company he formed in 1974, Elite Films. With his business partner and regular cinematographer Peter Baumgartner he also ran a German film production company called Ascot Film, and a dubbing studio in Berlin called Cinephon. [After many years working together, the two men parted company: Dietrich kept Ascot and Baumgartner kept Cinephon.] Music for the films was provided by Walter Baumgartner, Peter's uncle; Andreas Demmer and Rudolf Küttel took over as directors of photography when Baumgartner was unavailable; Hubertus Schmandtke handled sound; and Edgar Reiser was responsible for lighting. The set-up was stable, well-organised, and lucrative. As he recounted to *Delirium*'s Chris Alexander, Dietrich very quickly became one of the biggest success stories in German commercial cinema: "*The second movie I made for Ascot, Die Nichten der Frau Oberst, was such a huge success and paid out so well, I could clear all my debts and never had to borrow external funds again. Now I was an independent producer in Germany, unsinkable like the Titanic! Only an iceberg could stop me! I kept producing and directing up to ten movies a year.*"²

By 1975, Dietrich had directed somewhere in the region of thirty films, while his producer credits ran into the mid-forties. Not surprisingly, he was beginning to tire. What he really wanted was for someone to take over the creative side of things while he concentrated on the business end, so when Jess Franco appeared on the scene it was a classic case of 'plug, meet socket'. Franco needed solid financial backing; Dietrich needed a workaholic director to fill up his production slate. The result was an association that would carry Franco through the next two-and-a-half years, during which he directed some of his most striking and shocking films. His astonishing work-rate and ability to nail dark and dirty subject-matter made him a powerhouse player for Elite Films. With Dietrich's backing, Franco concentrated on his favourite erotic recipe; sex and sadism. The lid was off Franco's fantasies, and what slithered from his imagination during his Swiss sojourn can still shock some viewers today.

The first film on the slate was *Frauengefängnis* (better known to English speakers as *Barbed Wire Dolls*). A Women-in-Prison story in the vein of *99 Women*, it bore similarities to a script which Franco had been working on with Alain Petit, as Petit told me in 2013: "*When I first met Jess in February 1972, he asked me to write the script of a Women-in-Prison movie. That was in fact supposed to be produced by Eurociné, but they decided not to shoot it. So instead Jess asked me to work on Plaisir à trois which was eventually shot by Le Comptoir Français du Film. My script was called 'Macanao, l'enfer des*

... If I remember well, there were a lot of elements of my script in both *Diamants pour l'enfer* (the hold up at the beginning of the film) and *Frauengefängnis* (the ex Nazi doctor in prison, etc.). But what looks more like a *Women-in-Prison* film than another *Women-in-Prison* film?"³ Whatever the genesis of the project, Dietrich was all ears. In an interview for the Elite/Ascot "Jess Franco Collection", he explained: "[Franco] told me that he intended to shoot a film in the South of France, entitled *Frauengefängnis*. He needed some money, and someone who could take over post-production costs. It took him only an hour to convince me and get all the money he needed. He could send all his material to my laboratory. I also paid for the entire post-production in our Berlin studio."⁴ Having beguiled Dietrich with the *Women-in-Prison* script, Franco (trading as Manacoa Films P.C.) signed a contract with Elite Film on 12 August 1975⁵ to make a total of three films in the South of France during the same production block: 'Femmes en cages' (which became *Frauengefängnis*), 'Ce soir a porno-ville' (which became *Downtown*), and *Des mains blanches sur la peau noir*. (What this latter film was intended to be is unclear: it's possible that it relates to the film we know today as *Die Sklavinnen*, which Franco began shooting during this production period but didn't finish until 1977. By that time the original title had been translated into German and given to the unrelated Franco-Dietrich film *Weisse Haut auf Schwarzen Schenkeln*).

With Dietrich's financial support in the bank, Franco gathered his associates, shouldered his camera, and headed off for Fort Carré on the outskirts of Antibes to begin shooting *Frauengefängnis*. The chief villain of the film, a sadistic prison governess, was played by Monica Swinn, one of the leading lights of Franco's 'repertory company'. She took to the project with great pleasure and amusement, as she explained to me in 2016: "For *Frauengefängnis*, all my scenes were shot on the Côte d'Azur. A lot of scenes were shot, as you know, in the old 'Fort Carré d'Antibes', but not only the exterior ones. For centuries the place had been an important strategic military post. Rooms for the troops, apartments for officers, cells for prisoners, you got almost everything there. Jess could dream up the kind of film he had in mind! The place was still property of the State but there were no more troops, just a handful of military types assuming a permanent presence and a minimal custody. Counting on my serious appearance and my good French, Jess asked me to go with him to win the essential authorisation to shoot in that fabulous location. The official version he set up was that we were preparing a film, between documentary and fiction, about jails for women in South America! Produced by 'la télévision suisse-romande'. Great subject but tiny budget. Something serious, of course: the Swiss are serious people, aren't they? ... Apparently, the guy in charge had a high opinion of Swiss seriousness: not only did he give us the precious authorisation but also there would be nothing to pay in return! It was a kind of miracle. Of course, all the scenes too spicy to seem 'seriously' Swiss had to be shot elsewhere. No problem. Jess had rented a house (ground level plus one floor) with a little garden in Beaulieu. It was his base for the period. Lina, Ramón and I were quartered there with him (Jess was the cook: his tortillas were amongst the best I had ever eaten!). Some scenes were shot in this pavilion for *Frauengefängnis*."⁶

A few months later it was time for Dietrich to see the results of this sojourn in the Côte d'Azur – and it came as quite a shock. Like Franco's earlier work for Robert De Nesle it was 'rough and ready', with lots of zooms, several shots sliding out of focus, plenty of hand-held shakiness, and a general air of being made on the fly. Dietrich was horrified: "I saw the film in Berlin and was destroyed. It was blurred, partly out of focus, filmed without additional lighting. Jess himself acted as camera operator."⁷ He was also horrified that no one had thought to pull out the weeds from the cracks in the concrete at the ruined Fort which Franco was using for the prison! For Dietrich, whose own films were models of technical clarity, *Frauengefängnis* was incomprehensible. The notion that such an erratic film might be said to have a 'look' of its own was inconceivable. Given the norms of the industry, and no doubt Dietrich's prior expectations of a director whose films had played commercially in France and Spain for the past fifteen years, *Frauengefängnis* must have seemed to him like a joke, a slap in the face for his money: "I thought long and hard whether or not to release the film," he admitted.⁸ Franco, however, did not take the Swiss entrepreneur's misgivings lying down. He launched into a passionate defence of his work, claiming that his style more accurately reflected reality, and was more in keeping with contemporary trends in cinema. Franco's arguments won the day, and Dietrich agreed to release the film. In 1976, when receipts from West Germany started rolling in, it became clear that you really could put out a movie like this and make money. Whether Franco's theorising was so much flim-flam, or the expression of a genuine aesthetic outlook, was a question he could afford to dismiss. *Frauengefängnis* was a hit!

But if ticket sales allayed Dietrich's aesthetic misgivings, Franco's business approach was becoming more of a problem. In the month before starting work on *Frauengefängnis*, *Downtown* and *Des mains blanches sur la peau noir*, with Dietrich's financing confirmed, Franco set about arranging distribution deals unilaterally with two separate Italian companies, Gold International Film, and B.O.S. Co., selling Italian distribution rights to the as-yet-unmade films in return for advances on the eventual income. With Gold International Film, on 2 August 1975, he signed a contract for Italian distribution rights on *Frauengefängnis* (referred to as *Mujeres enjauladas* in the correspondence), and in September Dietrich received word from the Rome-based B.O.S. Co. about a film Franco was selling to them as "*Violenza erotica in a femminile carcere (Ex-Femmes en cage)*". This too was *Frauengefängnis*. Franco must have known that he would be found out, because in the contract with G.I.F. he undertook to inform the 'joint' rights holder (Dietrich's Elite Film) about the deal, and in a letter to Anna Crognale Hansen of B.O.S. Co. he wrote, "for this offer to be valid will require the approval of Elite Films of Zürich."⁹ And yet it's blatantly obvious that he did not in fact discuss these sales with Dietrich, because on 23 September 1975 he was asked by Dietrich to sign a contract with the following rather mind-boggling clause: "Mr. Jess Franco will not carry out illegal sales such as those to B.O.S."¹⁰ Note that this enshrines in writing an admission of guilt on Franco's part.¹¹

What on Earth was Franco doing? His actions seem so reckless. He had a brand new producer and a slate of new projects, yet he chose to risk his personal reputation – and his relationship with Dietrich – in search of extra money. What's more, he did so in circumstances that he would surely have known would lead to discovery sooner or later. Franco was not a greedy man, and he was certainly no fool, so the only explanation that makes sense of his behaviour is debt. As would become clear to Dietrich during 1976, Franco had mounting financial problems requiring urgent attention. His deal with G.I.F. would have netted him something in the region of thirty million lira (roughly £10,000 at that time). Either Franco needed it immediately, to pay off an angry creditor, or else he intended to use it to mount another production which could then be sold for even more. Either way, his actions behind Dietrich's back were erratic and disordered, perhaps with an element of panic: he was settling for quick fixes that would only seed more trouble further down the line...

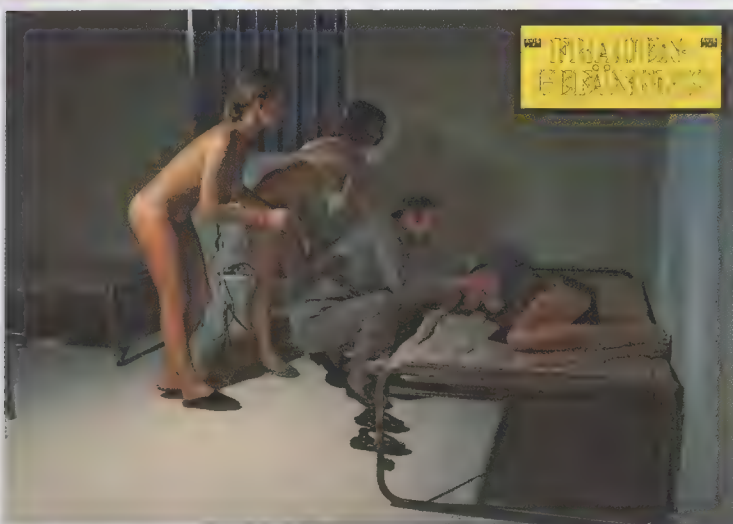
Review: Opening with a traumatised woman's scream, followed by one of Daniel White's most ominous title themes, *Barbed Wire Dolls* is Franco's defining moment in the Women-in-Prison genre, and it still packs a punch today. Shot guerrilla-style, with hand-held camera and lots of shaky, out-of-focus compositions, it can seem a depressing, downright ugly experience if you watch it in a serious mood. Such a view rather misses the alternative angle, however, from which one can see the film as a delirious wallow in excess, with a sardonic attitude, deliberate bad taste, and a devil-may-care love of sex and violence. Grim realism and fantasy sado-erotica make strange and sometimes uncomfortable bedfellows, but that's just the way Jess liked it. While it certainly has scenes that are shocking and disturbing, *Barbed Wire Dolls* is almost as keen to provoke laughter, such is the ripe melodramatic style of performance and the knowingly outrageous wickedness of the villains. Is it a sick-and-sleazy pigfest wallowing in cruelty and sexual violence? Or an outrageous camp classic with a twinkle in its eye? One thing's for certain, it's a film very much focussed on women. It's never going to please hardline feminists, but Franco nevertheless concentrates on the fears and desires of the female characters and views the odious male oppressors as decadent, stupid and corrupt.

Barbed Wire Dolls is not the nastiest of Franco's WIP films – that honour must go to *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* (1976) or *Women in Cellblock 9* (1977) – but it's a brutal march forward from Franco's first WIP film, *99 Women* (1968). Whereas that was ostensibly a mainstream production, and thus rather watered down, *Barbed Wire Dolls* is the raw condensate. All extraneous material is stripped away, with the salacious depiction of female suffering shoved naked and shivering to the foreground. Prominent among the scenes of sadism is the repeated use of an electrified metal bed-frame to punish naked prisoners, in particular Lina Romay. Franco's habitual disdain for special effects means that most of the work is done by Romay's agonised performance, assisted only by a fizzing electrical hum on the soundtrack whenever the

current is switched on, but the result is pretty intense. (Also very effective is the way the scene fades to black and then fades back in again several times; conveying the horrible idea of the victim repeatedly losing consciousness only to wake up to more agony.) In fact most of the cruelty in the film, including starvation, rape and sleep deprivation, is situational, and depends on good acting more than explicit visuals. Those weaned on graphically violent films like *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* may find the absence of mutilated flesh and popped eyeballs a tad disappointing, but it's the 'feel' of the thing that counts, and besides, the frequent exposure of the victims' vaginas should make up for in sleaze what is lost in gory fx.

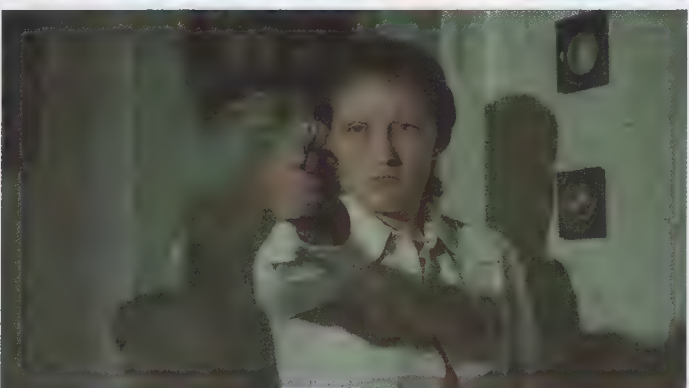
But having played up the film's dark streak, it would be remiss of me to neglect another way of watching this film; as a camp black comedy full of cartoonish sadism. Although Franco's poker-faced sick humour is not without its barbs and challenges, it's impossible to take *Barbed Wire Dolls* entirely seriously. One's mileage may vary, of course, but I suspect that twenty years of fetish-club imagery seeping into popular culture may have watered down the original shock value, ensuring that many viewers will contextualise the film within the environs of sexual role-play rather than the evils of 20th century history. Eric Falk, resident stud of the Dietrich stables, is the best example, snarling and yelling like the concentrated essence of a thousand cartoon bullyboys. Towering over victims, whip in hand, sometimes shirtless to emphasise his imposing physique, he's an unholy cross between a fumetti fascist and a hyper-virile 'Tom of Finland' character (a role he was born to play). We first see him brutalising Rosa (Franco regular Beni Cardoso), using extreme starvation to break her will, taunting her with a bowl of pasta then whipping her if she reaches for it. This radical slimming treatment, just five minutes into the film, will immediately divide the audience between those who see only an appalling visualisation of man's desire for total control over women, and those who find Falk's leather-jacketed bully sexy, hilarious, or both. Yelling "Will you shut your big mouth you stupid whore?", "Drop dead, you!", or "Must I whip you awake?" to a sleep-deprived victim, he's a grotesque parody of the big bad prison guard, whose leering menace is just a shade too enthusiastically naive to work as a genuine portrait of evil. There's something endearing about Falk's hammy performance; he's like some overgrown but essentially soppy hound snarling at a rubber toy (and I may be wrong, but I suspect he's been dubbed by a black actor in the English version; could it be Hong Kong Phooey voice artist Scatman Crothers?).

Then there's Monica Swinn, a regular actor for Franco, whose radical left-wing politics and feminist views may seem to run against the grain of sleazy fare like this. However, Swinn – a funny, sharp-witted and anarchic free spirit – was clearly unfazed by Franco's sadomasochistic fantasies. You can see that she's having a ball playing this fascist monster. And who wouldn't? How are we supposed to take seriously a film in which the governess of a women's prison wears a monocle, a belted tunic, high boots and hotpants? In which a female prisoner makes advances to the impotent male governor (Roger Darton), who angrily calls



LEFT COLUMN: German stills

Maria (Lina Romay) arrives at the run-down prison, observed by Dr. Costa (Paul Müller), the Governess (Monica Swinn), and two female guards.
 Berta (Martine Stedil) and Maria prepare to knock out Costa and rescue the weak and traumatised Rosa (Beni Cardoso).
 The Governor (Roger Darton) has a nasty plan for Berta.



RIGHT COLUMN: Monica Swinn demonstrates the pleasures of cruelty..

Sleazy, obsequious and devious Dr. Costa knows it's best to stay on the right side of the fearsome Governess.
 The end of the line for another poor unfortunate.
 Just because she's wearing chiffon, don't expect to see her tender side...
 A little light reading gets the Governess in the mood...



PHONE 234-8030
Varsity Twin
1633 W TENNESSEE ST

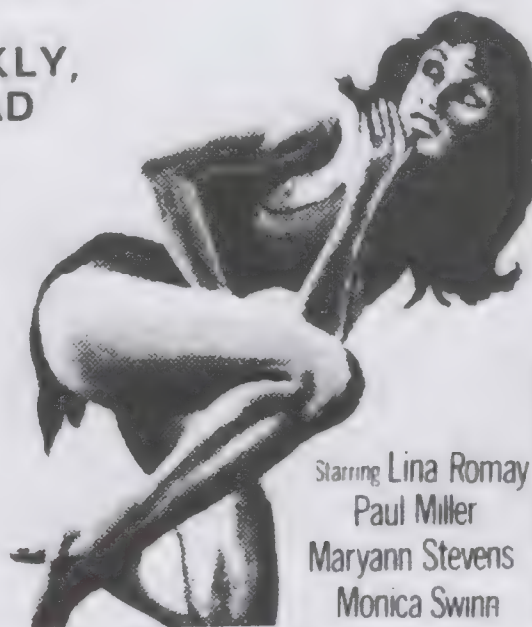
**MIDNIGHT SHOWS
FRIDAY AND SATURDAY**

**THEATRE
CLEARED
BEFORE
MIDNIGHT
SHOW**

**RATED
X**

GIRL INMATES LEARN QUICKLY,
YOU GIVE IN TO THE SEX-MAD
WARDEN . . . OR DIE . . .

**BARBED
WIRE**
Dolls



Starring Lina Romay
Paul Miller
Maryann Stevens
Monica Swinn

“Just a degenerate! Like a cat in full heat!” before ordering his ~~man~~ ^{man} ~~sidekick~~ ^{sidekick} to ravish her (to the accompaniment of cheesy latin ~~music~~ ^{music}). Frankly, anyone who can make it through *Frauengefängnis* without laughing is more of a menace to society than the film could ~~ever~~ ^{ever} be. Which is not to say that it’s possible to make it through the film on laughter alone. Every now and then Franco breaks through with a scene of genuine nastiness and horror. A good example is the fate of the character played by Peggy Markoff, a mentally ~~arranged~~ ^{arranged} inmate who seemingly views the whole prison experience as a trip to some kind of surreal holiday camp. Her capitulation to reality when being electrocuted for information about the ~~escapes~~ ^{escapes} (“I’ll confess everything... I’m not really Queen Isabella”) is an authentic moment of psychological horror, depicting as it does the destruction of a woman’s psyche by the crushing of her ~~defence~~ ^{defence} mechanisms.

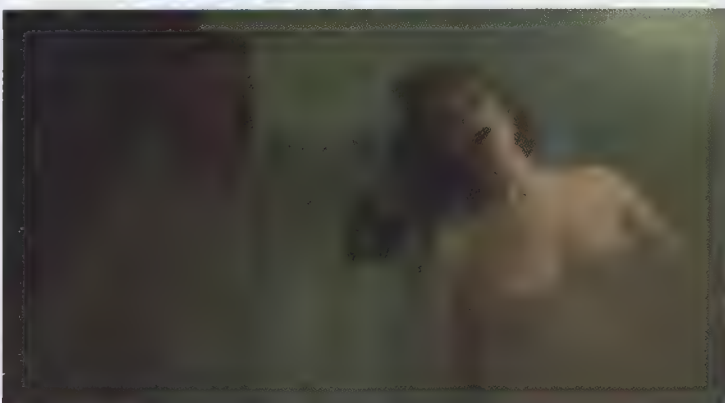
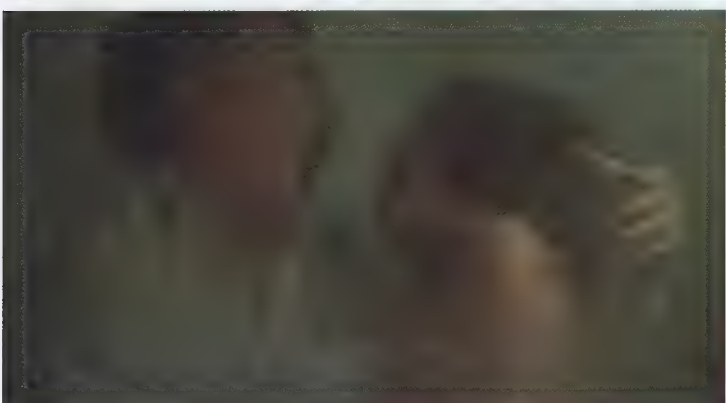
In the years ahead Franco would veer more and more towards purposeful genre instability, making films in which horror and absurd comedy fight a queasy sort of war in the viewer’s psyche. It’s a process that is already under way here. The first images that come to mind when I think about *Barbed Wire Dolls* are Monica Swinn’s wardress in hotpants and Eric Falk’s grinning muscle-cop, cartoonish images of fantasy brutality. But the grit in the oyster that begets these pearls of camp pleasure comes from real-world totalitarian oppression, something especially pertinent when one remembers Franco’s military namesake. After World War 2, General Franco maintained control of Spain with brutal measures: dissident views were systematically suppressed through censorship and intimidation, ideological enemies were imprisoned in forced labour camps throughout the country (such as Los Merinales in Seville, San Marcos in León, and Castuera in Extremadura), and if these tactics failed to quell resistance, there was always the death penalty. All of which goes some way to explaining the powerful illicit charge which Franco evidently got from the WIP format, and the undercurrent of anger that occasionally wells up in his prison scenarios. Although the contrast between sado-erotic film fantasies and the reality of authoritarian rule may seem grotesque, it has often been the way that the psychological trauma created by oppression is expressed through baroque forms of sadomasochistic sexuality. The degree to which this is a healthy process depends on individuals and the way they frame their desires; Jess Franco’s disarming frankness about the darker regions of his sexual make-up, and his decision to tell his stories equally through the eyes of victims and perpetrators, suggests an egalitarian sensibility and a determination to convey the full spectrum of desire. Repression is the enemy, in society or the psyche: cruel monstrosities of human behaviour – rape and molestation, abduction, torture and murder – are far more likely to arise when fantasy is repressed than when it’s explored through art and sexual role-play. Ultimately, the absence of self-censorship in Franco’s work speaks of honesty, self-awareness, and a commitment to personal freedom – in other words, the polar opposite of the hellish prisons he so obsessively depicts.

Franco on screen: What to say about this, one of Franco’s most jaw-dropping cameos? He plays a father who forces himself upon his daughter (Lina Romay) in the heat of incestuous lust. This alone would be striking enough, but the sleaziness is given a shot of pure lunacy by Franco’s decision to save on film stock by acting the scene in ‘slow motion’ while running the camera at normal speed! It’s a cherishable moment of comic lunacy in his filmography, and whether or not you find it funny probably determines if you will ever really ‘get’ his sense of humour.

Cast and crew: Lina Romay gives a fantastic performance, and Eric Falk is stunning, but the star of the film has to be Monica Swinn, who is blessed here with a signature role. In real life, Swinn could not be further removed from this jackbooted fascist: she was a social radical who, like many at the political fringes of French erotica, regarded pornography as a means to liberate the sexually oppressed masses and break through the lies of bourgeois relationships. Although scathing about the more mundane porno filmmakers she encountered, she loved Franco, telling *Sex Stars System*: “There is at least one guy with whom I made many films: Jess Franco. It was a pleasure working for him. As for saying that they were good movies... well, that’s something else. There are some that were good, yes, but also some appalling ones. What is good about Jess Franco, is that this guy is crazy about film... It is very important, because even if he’s doing a crappy film, in deplorable conditions, he seems first and foremost to be making a film, and it’s exciting. However, with other directors, one wonders why we are here, what we are doing on the set...”¹²

Music: For all that *Barbed Wire Dolls* was made quickly and cheaply, the main theme by Daniel White is a mini-masterpiece, completely mirroring the dynamic of the story. An implacable funeral march for keyboard, bass guitar and slow tom-tom beat, it would scarcely feel out of place on an early album by Siouxsie and the Banshees or The Cure. Like an escape attempt, or a rebellious thought in a repressive regime, it ascends cautiously, carefully, before subsiding, and then rising again. This intelligent melodic approach reveals that Franco and White knew exactly what they were doing. The piece relies heavily on the Arp Solina String Ensemble, a synthesiser whose icy shimmer makes a spellbinding impression on such intensely beautiful records as Joy Division’s “Atmosphere” and David Bowie’s album *Low*. *Frauengefängnis* would be far less powerful without it. Elsewhere, a creepy interlude for electric piano and synthesiser accompanies Maria’s flashback scene, and a sombre orchestral piece (actually Daniel White’s title theme for Franco’s 1963 adventure film *El Llanero*) adds weightiness, and a sense of money being spent at least somewhere, to the establishing shots of the prison. There’s also a harbinger of things to come in the presence of a piece by Walter Baumgartner, a flute melody set to a samba rhythm that was already familiar from Erwin Dietrich’s early 1970s releases. Dietrich would subsequently ring-fence the scores on Franco’s next dozen or so films, insisting on Baumgartner’s cues exclusively.

Locations: The credits state that location shooting took place in Honduras: this is untrue! Exteriors were shot at Fort Carré, a 16th-



From *Frauengefängnis* aka *Barbed Wire Dolls* clockwise from top left:
 (1) Fort Carré in Antibes. (2) Sadistic prison guard Nestor (Eric Falk) gets his kicks from torturing the prisoners. (3) The Governor (Roger Darton) summons Nestor to rape Berta for his amusement. (4) Maria is tortured on an electrified metal bed frame. (5 & 6) Maria has a 'slow motion' flashback to the day her father (Jess Franco) raped her. (7) a starving prisoner, Rosa (Beni Cardoso) is tortured with a plate of food placed just out of her reach. (8) Poor Rosa, deranged by unspeakable horrors, takes refuge in madness.

century granite construction on the coastal outskirts of Antibes, France. It's a marvellously atmospheric place, desolate and ugly, a titan which broods and glowers like a character in its own right. Franco made no effort to conceal the crumbling stonework, or the weeds growing between the cracks, a detail which scandalised producer Erwin Dietrich who thought it a sign of the director's utter carelessness. In fact it conveys very well a feeling that the characters have been abandoned in some decaying dead-end facility. The governor and guards act as though the world has left them alone to do as they please: the dereliction of buildings therefore mirrors the dereliction of state duty, with prisoners left to rot in the ruins ... James Bond fans will recognise Fort Carré as the villainous Largo's fortress in *Never Say Never Again* (1983).

UK theatrical release: Miracle Films submitted this to the BBFC as *Caged Women* and received an outright rejection on 25 August 1976. When they tried again the following year with a shorter version running 63m43s, they hit the same refusal, but this time succeeded in securing a 'local X' certificate from various town and city councils, though not before further unspecified cuts were made. The version released on video by Vipco in 1980 was an old UK cinema print running 60m02s in PAL, which when converted to the correct film running time equals 62m32s: this suggests a further 1m11s was lost from *Caged Women* en route to theatrical release. In 2004, Anchor Bay submitted a version for DVD under the title *Barbed Wire Dolls* which the BBFC cut by 41s (from 77m39s to 76m57s), removing a close-up of a fingered vagina before granting an '18' certificate ...

US theatrical release: *Barbed Wire Dolls* first turned up in the USA in April 1978. It was still playing cinemas in 1983, on a double bill with Rino Di Silvestro's *Women in Cellblock 7*.

Connections: The Governess reads *Inside the Third Reich*, Albert Speer's post-war exposé-cum-apologia, linking her to the Warden played by Mercedes McCambridge in *99 Women*, who also owned books about Hitler ... Ingrid refers to herself as Queen Isabella and invites Maria to be her Christopher Columbus (Queen Isabella of Spain, who reigned from 1474 to 1504, was the Royal sponsor of the Italian-born explorer) ... Erwin C. Dietrich directed his own *Frauengefängnis* variant, cunningly titled *Gefangene Frauen*, in 1980.

Other versions: No genuine alternative versions exist. However, footage from *Barbed Wire Dolls* turns up in two non-Franco films emanating from Eurociné: *Gardiennes du Penitencier* (aka *Brutes Paradise, Women's Hell*) and *Jailhouse Wardress ... In Obsession*, a typo resulted in the Italian theatrical release being given as *Penitenziario femminile per reali sessuali* instead of *Penitenziario femminile per reati sessuali*, which changes the meaning from 'Female prison for sexual offenses' to 'Female penitentiary for real sex'! ... A rare Spanish-language poster exists, bearing the title *Penitenziario de mujeres por reatos sexuales* – however it's unclear from which Spanish-speaking territory it originates. I have been unable to find listings under this title in any of the Spanish newspaper archives, which leads one to suspect that this was a South American release of some variety. On the basis of this poster, some have suggested that *Penitenziario*

de mujeres por reatos sexuales is an alternative title for Franco's *Die Sklavinnen*, but although the three listed cast members (Lina Romay, Martine Stedil and Eric Falk) appear in both *Die Sklavinnen* and *Barbed Wire Dolls*, the poster image depicts Romay as a prisoner with irons around her neck: this fits with *Barbed Wire Dolls* but not *Die Sklavinnen*, in which she plays a wicked brothel madame. The film was banned in Chile in April 1978 under its Spanish-language title *Reformatorio de las perdidas*. In neighbouring Argentina, the similarly titled *Emmanuelle en el reformatorio de las perdidas* was in fact Bruno Mattei's *Violence in a Woman's Prison* (1982).

WOMEN BEHIND BARS

(English language export/UK video)

French visa no: 47117

Belgium, France [& Italy?], 1975

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Prison de femmes (FR)

Les flagellées de la cellule 69 (BEL French-language)

The flagellated women of cell 69

De Gegeselde Vrouwen van Cel 69 (BEL Dutch-language)

The flagellated women of cell 69

Alternative titles

[Des] Diamants pour l'enfer (FR alt. theatrical/FR video)

Diamonds For Hell

[Una] secondina in un carcere femminile (IT theatrical)

A Female Jailor in a Women's Prison

Cellules de punition (CAN theatrical) *Punishment Cell*

Prison sado pour femmes (FR video) *SM Prison for Women*

The Whip aka **Le fouet** (FR video – both languages on the same cover. Onscreen video title card reads: *The Whip Le Fouet*)

Visa pour mourir (FR video retitling) *Visa to Die*

Frauengefängnis 2 (GER video/DVD) *Women's Prison 2*

Frauengefängnis 3 (GER DVD)

Girls Prison 3 (GER DVD alt. title)

Hell Diamonds (Eurociné online export poster)

Punition Cell (shooting title)

Cella di punizione (proposed Italian release title)

Unconfirmed titles

Le vice et le fouet (MF and Eurociné book)

Strafzelle (WG [Eurociné book]) *Punishment cell*

Production companies

Brux International Pictures (Brussels)



TOP: Eurociné pressbook for Women Behind Bars: the French title given is Prison de femmes, although despite close scrutiny of French trade and listings publications I've been unable to trace a French release under this (or any other) title.

BOTTOM LEFT: Letter of agreement in which Franco signs exploitation rights for Punition Cell aka Women Behind Bars to Erwin C. Dietrich for Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

Translation:

1. The rightholder gives full and exclusive exploitation rights and rights in all known formats of the film for the countries Germany, Switzerland / Lichtenstein and Austria.
2. The rightholder expressly and irrevocably declares that he is the sole owner of the assigned rights and secures the right of the claimant against any claims of third parties.
3. The rights contractor pays to the rightholder for the acquired rights the fixed price of DM 20,000.
4. The rightholder authorizes the rights contractor to obtain from the negative stored at the company Telecolor in Rome a negative or all necessary copies and trailers at the expense of the rights contractor.
5. The rights holder puts at the disposal of the rights contractor any advertising material, if available.
6. Jurisdiction is Zurich, Swiss law applies.

See p57 for a discussion of the implications...

BOTTOM RIGHT: Belgian poster for Women Behind

VEREINBARUNG

zwischen

Jess Franco Manera
Antonio Arias 7
Madrid 7 Spanien

nachfolgend Rechtsinhaber

und der

ELITE FILM AG
Kolkenstr. 21
8026 Zürich Schweiz

nachfolgend Rechtnehmer

betreffend den Film "PUNITION CELL" (Women behind bars)
nachfolgend Film.

1. Der Rechtsinhaber tritt an den Rechtnehmer die uneingeschränkten und alleinigen Auswertungs- und Vorführungsrechte in allen bekannten Formaten an dem Film für die Länder
Deutschland, Schweiz/Lichtenstein und Oesterreich ab.
2. Der Rechtsinhaber erklärt ausdrücklich und unwiderruflich, dass er alleiniger Inhaber der abgetretenen Rechte ist, und er sichert den Rechtnehmer gegen jede Ansprüche Dritter ab.
3. Der Rechtnehmer zahlt an den Rechtsinh. für die erworbenen Rechte den Fixpreis von DM 20'000.--.
4. Der Rechtsinhaber bevollmächtigt den Rechtnehmer von dem bei der Firma Telecolor in Rom gelagerten Negativ ein Internegativ oder alle notwendigen Kopien und Trailers auf Kosten des Rechtnehmers ziehen zu lassen.
5. Der Rechtsinhaber stellt den Rechtnehmer sofern vorhanden das Werbematerial zur Verfügung.
6. Gerichtsstand ist Zürich, es gilt Schweizer Recht.

Zürich, 15. September 1975

Jess Franco Manera

ELITE FILM AG

Rechtsinhaber

Rechtnehmer



Eurociné (Paris)

B.O.S. Co. (Rome) (named on Eurociné pressbook)

Elite Film (Zürich) named on IT fotobustas

General International (Rome) named on IT fotobustas

Theatrical distributor

Les Films du Dragon (Belgium)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa September	1975
Berlino (Italy)	03 February	1977
Naples	12 February	1977
Rome	04 August	1977

Theatrical running time

unknown

Video and DVD running times (converted)

UK 'Go Video' PAL VHS version	78m12s
USA 'Blue Underground' DVD	80m31s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Rick Deconnink']. **writer:** **Jess Franco** [as 'R. Marcegnac']. **director of photography:** **Jess Franco**. **music:** **Daniel J. White**. **assistant director:** **Nicole Guettard**. **production manager:** **Gerald Cazal** [as 'Gerald Casal']. **unit manager:** **Denis Torre**. **still photographer:** **Ramón Ardid**. *Unconfirmed, erroneous or pseudonymous credits (from the Italian release):* **story and screenplay:** **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'Marius Lefrère']. **director of photography:** **Ramón Velásquez**. **production director:** **Pierre Querut**. **editor:** **Raymond Dubois**. **post-synchronization:** **Elettronica Calpini**. **colour by** **Telecolor**. **executive producer:** **Manacoa**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Shirley Fields, Perry Mendoza's lover). **Roger Darton** (Milton Warren, insurance company investigator/English narrator). **Ronald Weiss** (Colonel Carlos du Bries [MF: Carlos de Vries], the warden). **Martine Stedil** (Martine, prisoner who's sleeping with du Bries). **Jesús Franco** (Bill, Milton Warren's associate). **Ramón Ardid** (role #1: Peri Mendoza, Shirley's lover/role #2: guard bringing new arrivals to du Bries). **Denis Torre** (role #1: 2nd masked gangster/role #2: chief guard at penitentiary, wearing cowboy hat). **Nathalie Chapell**. *Credited on Italian print:* **Frieda Altstadtter**. *Italian poster adds:* **James Danon**. **Charlie Christian**. *Additional material in Le Fouet:* **Joëlle Le Quément** (Cora). **Bernard Hug** (male gang member in flowered shirt).

Notes: 1) Contrary to some sources, Monica Swinn does not appear. 2) IT version credits Jess Franco as 'Clifford Brown'.

Synopsis: *In the wake of a successful diamond heist, Shirley Field shoots dead the man responsible, her criminal fiancé Perry Mendoza, then coolly turns herself in to the police, claiming she committed the murder because Mendoza was cheating on her. While locked away in a sinister*

seaside prison, Field attracts the attention of sundry ne'er-do-wells keen to discover the whereabouts of the stolen diamonds, which have not been found. Does Shirley know more than she's letting on? Among those trying to crack her resolve and glean the information are the prison Governor, Colonel Du Bries, resident prison snitch Martine, a rival crime figure called Bill, and the narrator, insurance executive Milton Warren, whose role is kept unexplained until the finale...

Production notes: The film best known as *Women Behind Bars* began life as a script treatment called *Prison de femmes*, before being renamed *Punition Cell* during shooting. It was filmed chiefly in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, thirteen miles up the coast from Antibes where *Barbed Wire Dolls* was shot, and it shared a quintet of cast members from that film. As the title suggests, it also features a women's prison setting. It is not a significant film artistically, but if you peer behind the scenes it's by far the most contentious of the period. The meat of the matter is an allegation made in 1992 by producer Erwin C. Dietrich that Franco had squirrelled away money intended for *Barbed Wire Dolls* to make *Women Behind Bars*, which he then sold to a different company. To be clear before we go any further: the two films were not shot simultaneously, they do not share identical footage, and their basic scenarios are quite different. The allegation is not one of plagiarism: Dietrich was saying that two films were made with his money, only one of which was given to him. If this is true, then despite having recently minted a potentially lucrative multi-film deal with Dietrich, Franco was recklessly exploiting his new-found backer by squeezing two Jess Franco paydays from one Erwin Dietrich budget.

Such trickery presents problems for the sympathetic observer. Franco always denied any wrongdoing, though not always convincingly. If he was being economical with the truth he had very good reason: future producers might think twice if he openly admitted filming scenes on a 'one for you, one for me' basis. On the other hand, such stories are part of the Franco mythos: numerous collaborators have referred to his habit of secretly shooting more than one project at the same time, and these stories tickle the funnybones of his fans. There's a buccaneering roguishness to his *modus operandi*, and Franco's personal charm meant that even when certain actors figured out what was going on, they were having too much fun working with him to object. Nevertheless, from a strictly ethical point of view Franco was spending someone else's money to make films he could sell for his own benefit. So how did he justify this practise to himself? I asked Antonio Mayans, with whom Franco worked throughout the 1980s, and he put it this way: "You pay Jess to make you a film. You give him the money, and he gives you a film. The film makes money, and that's that. So what if he's shot some scenes for another film, as long as he delivers the one he promised?" A producer might counter – with some validity, it has to be said – that when you give someone £30,000 to make a film, you want £30,000 worth of production value for your money. The way Franco worked, he would spend maybe two thirds of the available budget on the backer's film, working fast and filming loose, and

then use the remaining money to start another. He would consider this second film his property. He could then offer it to a different producer, either as a finished work or a part-finished film for which top-up money was needed. Sometimes, if the original investor was lucky, Franco would offer him both films, asking for more money to finish the second. But in some cases it seems he shot two movies for one budget and sold the second one elsewhere. Even in the cut-throat world of exploitation cinema, this could have led to serious legal trouble if word had got around.

Dietrich first discussed *Women Behind Bars* in an interview with Sven Regenstein & Thomas Schweer in the fanzine *Splattering Image*, which was translated into English for use in *Obsession* (Balbo; Blumenstock; Kessler) in 1992. "I did a film with [Jess] called *Frauengefängnis* (1975). It was the very first film I made with Franco. We had taken a series of photographs for the poster featuring a few naked women behind prison bars. Eventually we also used one of them for the German one-sheet. Later, during a visit to the MIFED film market in Italy, I saw a poster at an Italian film office for a film called *Women Behind Bars*. The poster design had been taken from one of the photos shot for my film. The direction was credited to Jess Franco and the cast was the same. Of course I said, 'What do you think you're doing? That's my film!' Finally the film turned out not to be *Frauengefängnis* but it did contain the same actors and sets as my production. The only difference was that *Women Behind Bars* had been shot in *Scope*. It seems Jess owed this Italian company some money, so he shot a small but usable film parallel to *Frauengefängnis*, without my knowledge of course, and then sold it to this company." For years this interview has provided the basis for understanding Franco's behaviour.

There is one serious piece of evidence contradicting this account, but before we examine it, let's consider Dietrich's claim that the same sets were used in both films. This was definitely not the case in the prison scenes: the walls, the cell doors and the exterior corridors are completely different. The only shared location is a luxurious chateau in Nice: in *Barbed Wire Dolls* it serves as the Governor's private residence, in *Women Behind Bars* it's Colonel du Bries' reception hall. In *Women Behind Bars* these shots total roughly two and a half minutes and they were evidently collected at the same time as the ones in *Barbed Wire Dolls*: the same vase of roses can be seen in both films, and the condition of the blooms is identical. Franco must have grabbed these shots for *Women Behind Bars* while shooting *Barbed Wire Dolls*, almost certainly on the same afternoon. (He also picked up a scene featuring Monica Swinn at the same location, which ended up in his next film *Downtown* – up to his old tricks again he was now juggling at least three projects simultaneously!) So if Franco really did shoot *Women Behind Bars* with money intended for *Barbed Wire Dolls*, any visible overlap between the two productions is limited to the Nice chateau footage. As for the shared cast, while it's true that both films star Lina Romay, Roger Darton, Ronald Weiss, Martine Stedil and Ramón Ardid, two of these (Romay and Ardid) were Franco regulars who appeared in a multitude of his films between 1973–1975. Stedil and Weiss are the two to watch: residents of the

Côte d'Azur, they appear to have thrown themselves with gusto into Franco's plans, appearing in all of the films he made during his month-long sojourn in the region.

Next we need to examine the promotional artworks described by Dietrich. According to him, a still taken for the *Frauengefängnis* poster turned up soon after on a poster for *Women Behind Bars*. While it's impossible to say precisely which image Dietrich saw, the only *Women Behind Bars* artwork I can find that looks similar to the *Frauengefängnis* poster is the one which graces the French-Canadian theatrical poster (retitled *Cellules de punition*). On it we see Lina Romay and Martine Stedil (aka 'Martine Steed') in a pose which, though it's not the same as the *Frauengefängnis* one-sheet, does seem to come from the same photo-session. Some details have been altered – Stedil is wearing a bra and Romay's short hair has been extended by a graphic artist to cover her nipples – but the giveaway is the textured stone wall in both shots, which has exactly the same sort of markings in both pictures: it's a studio scenery flat that's been painted to resemble stonework. Romay's fringe is identical too. (Unfortunately the poster lacks any kind of company credit.) The trade event at which Dietrich says he spotted the *Women Behind Bars* poster was MIFED (Mercato Internazionale del Film e del Documentario), which convened in Milan every October/November. With Franco shooting studio material for *Frauengefängnis* in September 1975, the photo session for the poster artwork must have taken place soon after. If Dietrich was correct about all this, Franco's great mistake was to give a handful of photos from the *Frauengefängnis* poster shoot to the company handling *Women Behind Bars*. Had he not done this, Dietrich would never have spotted the film at MIFED!

If we accept that it's likely these pictures came from the same photo session, we next have to look at the credits on the *Women Behind Bars* poster. Remember that Dietrich said, "The direction was credited to Jess Franco and the cast was the same [as *Frauengefängnis*]"'. If we take the Canadian poster as evidence of the kind of thing Dietrich saw at MIFED, then yes, the poster does indeed name Lina Romay, Ronald Weiss and Martine Steed/Stedil, all three of whom were in *Frauengefängnis*. As for Franco's directorial credit, though, the *Cellules de punition* poster bears the pseudonym 'A.M. Frank'. Note that this is not just any old Franco pseudonym; it's one he used later on Eurociné productions. It's also a pseudonym which Eurociné boss Marius Lesoeur used for his own directorial efforts (for instance *Une cage d'orée*, where he's credited as 'A.M.M. Frank') and it was used by Italian director Luigi Batzella too, for the French release of his Eurociné co-production *Black Gold Dossier* (1979). It would seem that Eurociné were the company who sold *Cellules de punition* to Canada.

So what do we make of Dietrich's assertion that the film was sold by Jess to an Italian company, to whom he owed money? The original German text of Dietrich's interview with *Splattering Image* reveals that the creditor in question was a woman ("Jess was somehow in debt to this woman, and to pay off this debt he made a small but usable film somewhere, which by the way he shot without the

actors noticing”), and indeed, a letter made available to me from the Dietrich archives reveals that Mrs. Anna Hansen of B.O.S. Co. Ltd. was in correspondence with Dietrich over the rights for *Women Behind Bars*. With an office in Rome (but trading from Vaduz, Liechtenstein), B.O.S. Co. was run by the husband and wife team of Knud and Anna Hansen (aka Anna Crognale Hansen) who went on to represent such Italian big-hitters as *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Nightmare City* at the Cannes film market a few years later. [In 1978 the Hansens also launched a second company, Compix International, although B.O.S. Co. ran concurrently for at least a year after.] The back page of the Eurociné pressbook for *Women Behind Bars* declares that world sales were being handled by B.O.S. Co. Ltd., which indicates how Eurociné came to get entangled in the story: Franco must have sold *Women Behind Bars* to B.O.S. Co., and they in turn sold the French rights to Eurociné. This tallies with a 1993 interview conducted by Alain Petit, in which Franco said, “*Women Behind Bars wasn’t made for Eurociné but for an Italian producer. Eurociné wanted to buy the rights.*”

So when did Dietrich become aware of *Women Behind Bars*? This is where the story gets tricky. In his interview with *Splattering Image*, Dietrich seems to have mixed up his recollections. A letter made available to me from the Dietrich archives (see p.54) shows that Dietrich bought rights to the film in September 1975, two months before the earliest MIFED event to which he could have been referring. The letter sees Franco (rights holder) signing “Punition Cell” to Dietrich for exploitation in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Note that he does not sign away world rights, just the territories that constituted Dietrich’s ‘home turf’. This suggests that circa September 1975, Dietrich thought that “Punition Cell” was a Manacoa film: in effect, he was buying his own property!

It’s possible that in the *Splattering Image* interview Dietrich was accidentally merging two different facets of this story in his memory. Perhaps the film which Dietrich saw for sale at one of the MIFEDs was not *Women Behind Bars* but *Les gardiennes du pénitencier* (aka *Jailhouse Wardress*)? This Eurociné hack-and-paste job combines footage from the Franco-Dietrich *Frauengefängnis* with new material shot by Alain Deruelle. This was Eurociné’s response to their dispute with Elite over the financing of *Frauengefängnis*; essentially creating a collage variant and selling it as a different movie. Perhaps Dietrich saw publicity materials for *Les gardiennes du pénitencier* at MIFED, not *Women Behind Bars*, and then mixed up the two different stories in his recollection?

Women Behind Bars was released in Italy in 1977 as *Secondina in un carcere femminile*, and the Italian poster announced that the film was a co-production between General International (a Rome-based production/distribution company) and Elite Film. Yes, Elite Film – Erwin Dietrich’s production company! Having found out about *Women Behind Bars*, it seems that Dietrich set about re-establishing control over what was, to all intents and purposes, one of his assets. The credit for Elite Films on the Italian poster suggests that by early 1977 Dietrich had somehow obtained the elements and arranged an Italian release of the film himself, as

a way of recouping his unwitting investment. What’s interesting is that Dietrich did not release the film through his own Italian company Prestige Film, nor did he strike a deal with B.O.S. Co., with whom he’d had correspondence. Instead, he turned to a company called General International, an American company based in Los Angeles, with an office in Rome for the purpose of distributing films in Italy, whose board chairman was Edmund L. Grainger, veteran producer of many American films such as *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949). Was General International a company to whom Franco owed money, with the joint release being Dietrich’s way of brokering a pay-off for his embattled director?

There’s one further curiosity to unravel regarding the Italian version. The credits on the poster and stills (produced by Elite and General International) don’t match the print! We can check the latter thanks to an Italian video release, which preserves the theatrical screen credits, with the exception of the opening company ‘presents’ card. Amazingly, with the exception of Romay and Daniel White, none of the screen credits match those on the Dietrich-sanctioned posters and stills. On the print, the credits list Romay, Ronald Weiss, Roger Darton, Martine Stedil, and Clifford Brown (aka Franco), all of whom appear in the film, plus someone called Frieda Altstadt, about whom nothing is known. The posters, on the other hand, credit Romay, Benny Cardoso, Charlie Christian (aka Alain Petit), Paul Müller, Ray Hardy (aka Ramón Ardid) and James Danon, only two of whom (Romay and Ardid) are in the film! And that’s not all: the onscreen credits include the following eye-opener: “executive producer: Manacoa”. To explain this, I can only speculate that the film print itself was prepared by Franco for B.O.S. Co., with his company Manacoa being the sole rights holders as far as B.O.S. Co. were concerned. Dietrich then found out about the project, blocked the B.O.S. Co. release, took control of the asset, and created new promotional materials without having checked the credits on the Franco-approved version sitting in the labs in Rome. In which case, by the time the inconsistencies were spotted it was too late to correct them without junking the posters and stills and starting again.

Of course, much of this theorising rests on Dietrich’s conviction that Franco had essentially ripped him off. So is there any further corroboration? Monica Swinn, when asked about the period in question, told *Obsession*: “*Frauengefängnis and Downtown were begun in Beaulieu, near Nice, and in the fort at Antibes. [Franco] was also shooting inserts for earlier films, or for ones he was about to make for other producers, of course.*” (Note that she was not involved in *Women Behind Bars*). Swinn’s mention here of “films for other producers” appears to confirm Dietrich’s suspicions.

So what did Franco say? In a documentary on the Blue Underground DVD of *Women Behind Bars*, he claimed: “*Someone told Dietrich when they saw Women Behind Bars that I made the film with the trims from Frauengefängnis. I have a reputation of being a magician, because with the trims from Frauengefängnis it was impossible to do anything but just a very short film of two minutes! They got this idea because the film was made in principal in the same places, in*

principal with the same actors. No no no. No one [unintelligible word] comes from the same film. I didn't need to show any proof because it was very clear, but anyway, *Frauengefängnis* is made in Scope, Techniscope; *Women Behind Bars* is made in panoramic screen, not with the system of scope. So it's quite impossible to do the same things together. If you are very rich, but not in my case!"

Here we see Franco adopting a 'straw man' argument to divert from the real accusation. He can say in all honesty that he did not use 'trims' from *Barbed Wire Dolls* in *Women Behind Bars*, but that's not what is being alleged. His protest about the impossibility of cutting footage from one film into the other because of the different aspect ratios would be a fine rebuttal, if anyone were suggesting it. But they aren't. The allegation concerns misuse of funds, not misuse of footage. Franco goes on to suggest that disgruntled ex-colleagues were the source of the misleading information which so upset Dietrich: "I realised that some people – I know who they were, some guys from the production who didn't like me so much, because I didn't like them so much – they decided to try to fuck me up, which they didn't do because Dietrich said all those things but then he was asking me to make more films. The moment that [*Frauengefängnis*] opened he was happy, because he made his fortune with this film." This is incorrect: Dietrich didn't 'make his fortune' from Franco's film; he was already considerably wealthy from his own films. And as we shall see, events in the last two months of 1975 suggest a very different explanation for Dietrich continuing to work with Franco (see *Mandinga* and *Girls in the Night Traffic*).

The most compelling evidence to suggest that Franco shot *Women Behind Bars* with Erwin Dietrich's money is a letter dated 13 August 1976, which Franco wrote to Enrico Colombo at Telecolor. In it, he urges Colombo to allow Dietrich access to the negative of *Women Behind Bars* (aka *Punition Cell*) with a view to striking release prints: "My dear friend, as you well know (look at our agreements, and also, if you like, my contracts with Mrs. Hanssen) [i.e. Anna Crognale Hansen of B.O.S. Co.], the films 'Punition Cell' and 'L'assassin portait des bas noirs' have been largely funded by Elite Film. Now they want to start work immediately on these movies in their territories (Switzerland, Germany, Austria), that is to say the first of the films. I convinced the gentlemen at Elite Film to make copies at your place, despite their bad experiences with other Italian laboratories. I beg you not to make difficulties because as you know, they are perfectly entitled and they will order about twenty copies so you know how serious they are." The first thing to note here is the open admission by Franco that *Women Behind Bars* was funded by Elite, in contradiction of the September 1975 letter in which he signed over the rights to Dietrich after completion. Dietrich must have asked Franco to persuade Telecolor to give him access to the negative. This letter sees Franco assisting in Dietrich's mission to gain legal control of *Women Behind Bars*, and is, I would have thought, a strong indication that Franco admitted, at least in private to Dietrich, that he had used Dietrich's money to make it. (For more discussion of the other film Franco mentions, see the entry for *L'assassin portait des bas noirs*.)

Women Behind Bars was at some point bought by Eurociné with a view to releasing it in France and possibly the UK. A French-language print and an English-language print both exist, bearing Eurociné's credits, and they both came out on video in their respective countries in the early 1980s. However, despite combing through years of French documentation, I've been unable to find evidence that it ever played theatrically in France, under any of its multitude of variant titles. The only European country where Eurociné succeeded in releasing the film theatrically appears to have been Belgium, where it played as *Les flagellées de la cellule 69* (note the similarity to the title given the Canadian release, *Cellules de punition*). I suspect that this is because Dietrich managed to put a stop to Eurociné's plans, some time after they'd spent money on striking one or more prints, dubbing the English and French dialogue tracks, etc.

Erwin Dietrich clearly wanted Franco safely under contract as his 'house director', and it seems he was willing to go to bat to extricate him from his tangle of self-made problems. None of this would be worth Dietrich's trouble, however, if word got around that Franco was acting dishonestly with his producer's funds. Future business dealings would be compromised if potential investors could point to evidence of financial impropriety.

To the end of his days Franco strenuously denied these allegations. He would often deliberately 'misunderstand' what was being suggested, claiming it was absurd to think that a man could make two films simultaneously; anyone who suggested such a thing knew nothing about making movies! This, however, was another 'straw man' tactic. No one was suggesting that two fully-fledged productions were being juggled simultaneously; instead, the claim was that while shooting one film, Franco would shoot scenes for later use in a film yet to be started. In the text of this book I have referred to these surreptitious films as 'back pocket productions'; projects born out of fleeting impulse, or the canny awareness that a set-up could yield an extra take to be squirrelled away for future use. As for his refusal to admit to anything of the sort; he may have been born in Catholic Spain, but Jess Franco would never have been seen dead in a confessional booth!

Review: *Women Behind Bars* concerns the efforts of various individuals to persuade an imprisoned *femme fatale* to divulge where she's hidden some stolen jewels. It's also the story of a pair of crooks who pull off a complicated and daring double cross, essentially getting away with daylight robbery. Bearing in mind the film's questionable production history it's tempting to say that recent events in the life of Jess Franco were making their way subconsciously into his movies...

But while the film is more complicated than you might expect from its reputation as a quick knock-off, it remains fairly tedious. Despite being partially set in a women's prison, there's little of the crude sado-sexual grimness which made *Barbed Wire Dolls* so compelling. *Women Behind Bars* does restage some aspects of *Dolls*, but by interspersing them with a convoluted plot involving crooked insurance investigators, stolen diamonds and sundry

double-crossing, Franco adds more than enough new material to give the film its own identity; it's just that the material itself is weak and uninvolved. What little fun there is to be had comes from Franco's bare-faced cheek in convening a prison drama in what looks suspiciously like an outdoor sports-and-leisure club. The geography of the prison is impossible to believe: a concrete underpass stands in for the usual labyrinth of locked gates, the canteen resembles a swimming pool café, the Governor lives in a palatial villa apparently inside the prison grounds, while the inmates bemoan their fate whilst lounging next to chain-link fences through which leafy car-parks and residential apartments can be seen. These flagrantly municipal settings do at least give the film a touch of the absurd, as if, like the party guests in Luis Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*, the prisoners are somehow trapped in a prison of their own imagining rather than the real thing.

Considering the exploitation potential of the story, the prison sequences are limp compared to *Barbed Wire Dolls* or later examples like *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*. There's too little nastiness on display and the pace soon slumps. Brutality is corralled into two minor sequences: a whipping, with the camera focussing on a jiggling female posterior; and a vaginal electrocution, which although nasty in conception is so casually performed that it arouses neither sadistic excitement nor horror. Frankly, to liven things up the film itself needs jump-leads attached to its tender parts. Adding to the disinterested, disengaged vibe is a would-be noirish voice-over, whose chief function is to fill in details that Franco couldn't afford to shoot (court scenes, police swoops, anything that would require a larger cast). The result feels more like Doris Wishman than *The Naked City*. Life-sentence inmates of the Franco madhouse will find some of the elements here seductive, but most exploitation fans will regard this as simply a mundane crime melodrama with an inadequate smattering of sleaze. Perhaps it's best to give wronged producer Erwin Dietrich the last word on *Women Behind Bars*: when interviewed many years later about the way Franco had used his producer's money to shoot two films, his response was commendably phlegmatic: "At least he gave me the good one!"

Franco on screen: Franco plays a violent gangster working for a rival crime outfit, a role similar to the ones that he plays in *Midnight Party* and *Die Sklavinnen*.

Music: If only the film itself were as hectic and hilarious as Daniel White's title music, which is based around a manic piano set to a frantic drum-machine two-step, decorated with fussy trills and arpeggios. Brimming with tacky lunacy, it's like a teenage Richard Clayderman trying to impress us with his fancy piano skills after a big line of coke. It can be found on the Daniel J. White library record *Mood Music Selection No. 01: Cocktail*, under the title "Noria vivace". Also from the same LP, and heard here for the first time, is "Introspection No.1", a track that Franco would later use as the title theme for his creepy 1983 horror film *Mil sexes tiene la noche*. Another piece, for cello, electric piano and ARP Solina, employs a melody line that's an ironic kissing cousin to Bach's 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring'.

Locations: Supposedly set in Central America, this is once again shot in France, chiefly Beaulieu-sur-Mer. The Don Gregorio hotel in which Milton Warren stays (now the Hotel Artemis) is a minute's walk from the Beaulieu-sur-Mer railway station featured in the credits. The hotel room where Darton and Franco interrogate Romay is in the same hotel, overlooking the station. The club where Shirley meets and kills her boyfriend is Le Grande Casino de Beaulieu (as it's now called), on the Avenue Fernand Dunan. However, the interiors were shot in a basement bar at the (far cheaper) Hotel Artemis. The film has a couple of location interiors (chiefly the Governor's office) in common with *Downtown*, Franco's next crime caper for Dietrich. Monica Swinn recalls that these were shot at a luxury villa in Nice.

Connections: Voice-over musings from crooked insurance investigator Milton Warren link this to classic Hollywood film-noir, as does Romay's double-crossing femme fatale.

Other versions: The version released on French video as *Le Fouet* includes eleven-and-a-half minutes of extra footage, expanding the roles of the fleetingly glimpsed bandits who rob a boat in the pre-credits sequence. The new material comes in four sections: a discussion between two male gang members and Cora their moll (Joëlle Le Quément) at their apartment hide-out; a further discussion between the two men at the same location where they are joined by a vivacious blonde; a scene in which the blonde visits the prison and offers sexual favours to the Governor (played as per the original by Ronald Weiss); and a scene between Cora and the blonde in which Cora packs her bags and leaves the hide-out. Several things pique one's curiosity about these additions. Firstly, they are mostly expository, underlining the fact that Shirley double-crossed the gang who pulled off the robbery. Only the prison scene offers any exploitable imagery, namely the blonde woman stripping to her underwear. It seems odd for a distributor to have asked for such generally banal material to be added. Secondly, it's intriguing that Ronald Weiss turns up in one of the additional scenes. Weiss was a theatre actor working in Nice who fell in with Franco in 1975; he appeared in all of the films Franco made in the South of France that year. He then turned up in *Une cage d'orée* (1976), which Eurociné boss Marius Lesoeur directed with assistance from Franco. Weiss's name has also been attached by various sources to the Eurociné productions *Elsa Fraulein SS* (1977) and *Special Train for Hitler* (1977). However, I have combed through both films and can see no sign of him. Given that no one who credits Weiss for these films can specify which character he's supposed to be playing, I personally don't believe he was ever in them, which means that apart from a single ultra-obscure French sex film (*Nelly, pile ou face*, 1976), Weiss only ever worked with Franco. This, plus the expository nature of the additional scenes, makes me wonder whether Franco shot the new material, at someone's behest, to clarify the film's haphazard plotting. Technically and stylistically, the new scenes are as banal as their subject matter, so if they really were shot by Franco he didn't put very much into them, though to be fair, the first of the additions does at least try to match the

original material: one of the robbers puts on a white plastic face mask, a link to the opening robbery scene in which the thieves wore similar masks. However, the mask is a different shape, so we can be sure that this scene wasn't filmed during the original shooting period. According to *The Manacoa Files*, a variant edit exists which replaces the punishment cell beatings with material shot by persons unknown ... The French-language title *Femmes en cages*, which appears never to have seen the light of a movie projector, already had rather a pedigree in 1975, having served as the Belgian title for John Cromwell's *Caged* (1950), the French title for Gerardo de Leon's *Women in Cages* (1971), and the French title for Brunello Rondi's *Prigione di donna* (1974). Likewise *Visa pour l'enfer* (a variant title mentioned in Christophe Bier's book *Eurociné 33 Champs-Élysées*), which had previously been used for a 1958 crime thriller starring Claudine Dupuis and Jean Gaven. Some sources mistakenly claim that the Belgian title *Les flagellées de la cellule 69* relates to a different Franco film, namely *Die Sklavinnen* (1975). This is based on the fact that the three actors named on the Belgian poster (Weiss, Romay and Stedil) are in *Die Sklavinnen* too. However, the title doesn't fit *Die Sklavinnen*, which despite being about white slavery features neither prison cells nor flagellation; it's actually about drugging women and controlling them by force of will. By contrast, *Women Behind Bars* includes numerous scenes set in a communal prison cell, and a punishment room where whipping is carried out. Finally, Ronald Weiss plays a minor character in *Die Sklavinnen*, whilst in *Women Behind Bars* he's the chief villain.

DOWNTOWN

(West German theatrical title)

Switzerland, 1975

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Downtown (SWI/WG)

Alternative titles

Die nackten Puppen der Unterwelt (Downtown) (GER DVD)

The Naked Dolls of the Underworld (Downtown)

Downtown Die Nackten Puppen der Unterwelt (SWI DVD)

Les Putains de la ville basse (BEL theatrical [SSS/MF])

The Whores from Downtown

Ce soir à Porno-ville (title on contracts and correspondence)

Tonight in Pornoville

Rote Lippen – Schwarze Stiefel (German shooting title on contract between Franco and Dietrich)

Lèvres rouges et bottes noires (alt. FR shooting title)

Red Lips and Black Boots

Schwarze nylons, wilde engel (WG video)

Black Nylons, Wild Angels

Unconfirmed titles

Les Bas fonds (alt. FR title) literal translation: *The Lower Depths*, or colloquially, *Downtown*

Production company

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (SW/West Germany)

Timeline

Contract signed	12 August	1975
Shooting in Beaulieu-sur-Mer	18-25 August	1975
Shooting in Nice	26-30 August	1975
Shooting on sets in Zürich	September	1975
Last day of shooting in Zürich	04 October	1975
German 'X' certificate JK429	02 June	1976
Germany	23 July	1976
Zürich	August	1978

Notes: 1) *Downtown* or *Down Town*? The onscreen text layout is ambiguous. Early documentation lists the film as *Down Town*, but Dietrich's Ascot-Elite Blu-ray cover went with *Downtown*. 2) The website Zelluloid.de claims a much earlier German release date: 28 August 1975, and the IMDb lists a Swiss release date of 28 August 1975. These are incorrect: studio inserts for *Downtown* were still being shot in September 1975.

Theatrical running time

Germany 74m29s

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite 80m59s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Wolfgang Frank']. writer: **Jess Franco** [as 'Wolfgang Frank']. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'E.C. Dietrich']. An **Elite Film** Production. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khunne': SWI pressbook]. production manager (Switzerland): **Paul Grau**. editor: **Peter Baumgartner**. sound: **Hubertus Schmandtke** [as 'Hubertus Schmandke']. dialogue: **Christine Lembach**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**, VIP Musikverlag, Zürich. Produced in the **Elite Film** studios (Zürich). world sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich). *Uncredited:* assistant director (France): **Gerald Cazal**. still photographer: **Ramón Ardid**. negative: **Geyer Werke Laboratory** (Berlin).

Cast: **Jess Franco** [as 'Frank Manera'] (Algino 'Al' Pereira). **Lina Romay** ('Cynthia Ramos' aka 'Annette'; stage name 'Cynthia La Belle'). **Martine Stedil** [as 'Martina Domingo'] (Lola, Cynthia's lover/associate, stage name 'Sexi Rexi'). **Eric Falk** [as 'Erich Falk'] (Carlos Rivas, blackmail victim). **Roman Huber** (Tefeiro Ramos, gangster). *Uncredited:* **Ramón Ardid** (Pepé, Pereira's assistant).

Beni Cardoso (Rita, nightclub bartender and Al's sometime lover). **Peggy Markoff** (woman who talks to Pereira at nightclub). **Paul Müller** (Inspector Mendoza). **Ronald Weiss** (Henri, Mendoza's assistant). **Monica Swinn** (Olga Ramos, Tefeiro Ramos's real wife).

Synopsis: *Cynthia Ramos hires private detective Al Pereira to take pictures of her husband Tefeiro, a nightclub owner, in bed with his mistress. Not long after he's taken the pictures the man is found murdered with copies of the photographs in his pocket. Inspector Mendoza tells Pereira he's the main suspect – unless he can back up his story. Pereira takes the police to the address Cynthia Ramos gave and is astonished to discover that the real Mrs. Ramos is not the woman who hired him – and even more astonished when she backs up his story anyway. As the truth emerges that the real Mrs. Ramos murdered her husband, Pereira – despite his better judgement – enters into a second arrangement with the duplicitous 'Cynthia' and her sexy sidekick Lola. This time he is a willing accomplice in the blackmail of one Carlos Rivas – but can he trust his partners in crime?*

Production notes: Next before the camera was *Downtown*, a very low budget effort with Franco in a starring role as the hapless private eye Al Pereira, manipulated into a world of trouble by femme fatale Lina Romay. Made hot on the heels of *Barbed Wire Dolls*, it features many of the same cast members (Lina Romay, Monica Swinn, Paul Müller, Peggy Markoff, Beni Cardoso, Eric Falk, Martine Stedil, Ronald Weiss, Ramón Ardid), and locations also seen in *Women Behind Bars*. As Monica Swinn explained to me, “*Jess had rented a house (ground level plus one floor) with a little garden in Beaulieu. It was his base for the period. Lina, Ramón and I were quartered there with him. Some scenes were shot in this pavilion for Fraueingefängnis (and very likely for Downtown, but I am not 100 percent sure). My single appearance (a few seconds) in Downtown, going down a staircase, was shot in a big luxurious ancient property in the neighbourhood of another city, probably Nice. It was a scene with Jess, Paul Müller, and also Ronald Weiss, I think... Knowing Jess, he surely used that place in more than one of the films he made that year on the Riviera.*”¹

Review: As an actor, Franco often played supporting characters in his own films, but only rarely did he take the lead. The first occasion, 1974's *Exorcism*, was a dark and dirty horror film about a screwed up serial killer; the second, *Downtown*, saw Franco in a sunnier, more playful mood, playing the fall-guy in a dryly amusing hard-boiled detective story that effectively makes amends for the tiresome *Women Behind Bars*. He plays Al Pereira, a down-on-his-luck private dick who falls under the spell of Cynthia Ramos, an incorrigibly amoral stripper whose favourite scheme involves blackmailing rich men for fun and profit. Chronically horny, and short of cash, Pereira ends up hopelessly enmeshed in her nefarious activities. When she offers a \$2,500 down payment, with \$5,000 on completion of the job, he asks, poker-faced, “*Who do I bump off?*”

The job actually entails taking photographs of Cynthia's husband Tefeiro Ramos and his new mistress, in flagrante delicto. However, Cynthia's ploy is much more complicated, and Pereira soon finds himself embroiled in a world of trouble...

Downtown is a witty and amusing piece of work, and the fact that Cynthia Ramos is played by Franco's muse and soon-to-be partner Lina Romay gives added sparkle to the dialogue. In fact the script plays a teasing double game, with many exchanges written as gentle mockery between star and director. Consider Cynthia's ironic comment that Pereira should have no difficulty finding time for the job she is offering – “*With your routine, I'm sure you'll manage perfectly.*” The irony is twofold – Cynthia is mocking Pereira's reduced circumstances and lack of work, while Romay is joking with Franco about his insanely busy filming schedule. The dialogue has many such moments where the real life relationship shades into the action onscreen. “*I'm not the type to enjoy watching another guy hump a girl,*” protests Pereira, which of course is precisely what Franco does for a living! Later, he's berated by his girlfriend Rita: “*You're too fat, you've got to get rid of this flabby belly!*” (comments which refer to Franco's less than trim physique whilst also echoing Marlene Dietrich's remark to Orson Welles in *Touch of Evil* – “*You should lay off those candy-bars.*”). *Downtown* is also an example – not quite as shocking as *Sexorcisme* (the hardcore version of *Exorcism* discussed in Volume 1) but still worth noting – of Franco displaying his own lustful nature onscreen. We see him in a threesome with Romay and Martine Stedil, and though he remains clothed the whole time there's something quite impressive about a well known movie director nibbling at his partner's nipples and fingering her pussy onscreen. It's hard to imagine Tim Burton and Helena Bonham-Carter being so bold. Franco's insecurity regarding his lack of conventional good looks in comparison to the lovely Romay is expressed in the line, “*I can't imagine anything about me interesting you*” as he hands Cynthia the incriminating pictures of her husband. “*Suddenly so modest, Monsieur Pereira,*” she purrs, “*It doesn't match the idea I had of you.*” The tables are turned for a while as Cynthia strips and bares her pussy to Pereira, intending to manipulate him. Now it's his turn to tease his ‘tormentor’: “*You're putting on an extremely weak act,*” he remarks. When Romay/Cynthia tuts that she's failed to impress, Franco/Pereira replies, “*I don't want to hurt you, but it isn't so easy with a man of my experience.*” She apologises for underestimating him, then continues, “*I immediately noticed that you would be the right man for me.*” The ironies keep on coming: Romay announces “*I'm no career-addicted busty film star,*” although this is precisely the role she had just played – using her own name and talking to camera! – in *Midnight Party*, made just a few months earlier. While these metatextual double entendres are often trivial in themselves, they contribute to a sense that layers of reality are mingling and superimposing, as Franco's prolific output brings him closer and closer to a sort of Godardian fusion of fact and fiction, in which shooting a story and living a life are enmeshed in ironic synchronicity (“*If my mother knew how I earn my living!*” Pereira sighs in voice-over, as a giant close-up of Martine

Stedil's pussy looms on the screen). Perhaps most striking of all is the scene in which Pereira hides behind a two way mirror and snaps photographs of Cynthia and Lola seducing Carlos Rivas (Eric Falk). They ply him with drugged alcohol and pose him for blackmail but Pereira gets impatient with the pace of the seduction and begins issuing instructions which the drugged Rivas hears: fortunately he's so out of his head that he's convinced a talking mirror is addressing him, and so the seduction can continue. This of course draws our attention to Franco as the voyeur-cum-controller of the image, demonstrating the way he steers events via the camera and through his surrogate, Pereira, allowing us to observe his approach to directing.

Of course, the hapless hero must suffer the fate of all private dicks who cross swords with a *femme fatale* – being played for a fool and left in the lurch. What's interesting is the way these scenes provide a window into the playful relationship between Franco and Romay – that they can play-act betrayal speaks volumes for the solidity of their burgeoning friendship. Ever since they'd met in 1972, romance had slowly been blossoming, although Romay was still married to Ramón Ardid at the time. In *Downtown*, however, we can see the spark that crackles between them. And where is Ardid in all this? He plays Pereira's dogsbody, his sidekick, his gopher. Perhaps this uncomfortable confluence of truth and make-believe contributed to Ardid's disillusionment? It's one thing to cast Ardid as the slave of his wife (as Franco does in *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Doriana Gray*); but it's rubbing it in a bit to cast him as a spare part while Franco canoodles with Romay onscreen. (See also *Mandinga*.)

Franco obviously had fun writing the script: it's replete with pithy one liners. Cynthia describes sex with her husband as “*not half as bad as toothache*” – a wonderfully noirish put-down that Robert Aldrich might have relished. “*If I didn't know I had brains, I'd begin to doubt it,*” says Pereira as he allows himself to be drawn against his better judgement into Cynthia and Lola's blackmail scheme. *Downtown* even manages to get away with that bane of low budget productions, the voice-over. The tone is reflective, personal, and thanks to reasonably well-translated subtitles, conveyed without embarrassing glitches. The whole film has a wonderful lazy-Sunday feel about it; the locations are attractive without being too ‘picture-postcard’, and the playful drama carries a bitter-sweet undertow of half-remembered forties gangster noir. It's best watched about halfway through one's Jess Franco journey, when the echoes and ironies of the dialogue strike sparks with one's knowledge of the man and his films. Witty and worldly and full of fun, *Downtown* is a refreshingly idiosyncratic work that deserves wider appreciation.

Franco on screen: Jess is a constant delight in this film, delivering, along with *Exorcism*, his most sustained and revealing performance. Note too how affectionate and tolerant is Al Pereira's relationship with Beni Cardoso's character Rita: even though she's his sometime lover she offers him sage advice on the much younger woman with whom he's becoming obsessed. It's evident from the way Cardoso and Franco interact that they share a warmth and

familiarity with each other (Cardoso had been acting for Franco since 1968's *The Girl from Rio*). One also wonders whether the character of Rita is a sketch of Franco's then wife Nicole, who must surely have been aware by then of Franco's wandering eye and his gradually increasing erotic fascination with Romay?

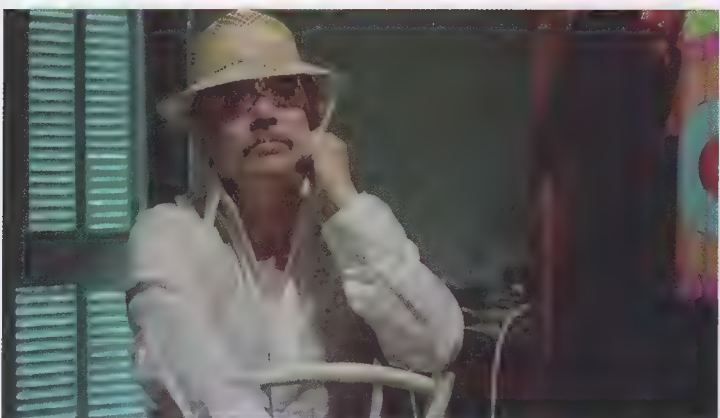
Cast and crew: During his stay in the South of France, Franco relied heavily upon the support of two new cast members, eighteen-year-old beauty Martine Stedil, and the villainous-looking Ronald Weiss. Their work for Franco begins and ends with this run of five adjacent productions: *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Downtown*, *Die Sklavinnen*, *Die Marquise von Sade* and the contentious *Women Behind Bars*. Along with Lina Romay and her young husband Ramón Ardid, who were now firmly ensconced as regulars, Stedil and Weiss were joined by members of the extended Franco ‘family’ who would fly to the coast when required: close friend Monica Swinn was the most frequently involved (she's in *Midnight Party*, *Shining Sex*, *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Downtown* and *Die Marquise von Sade*), while Paul Müller and Beni Cardoso dropped in for *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Downtown*. (Cardoso, a Brazilian actress whom Franco first met while filming *The Girl from Rio* in 1968, travelled to Italy in the mid-1970s. During a visit to the actor Paul Müller she met Müller's son and they became a couple, which explains how Cardoso and Müller Sr. came to appear together in *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Downtown*.) But although the films were Erwin Dietrich productions, none of the producer's Swiss or German performers were invited to join Franco on location. Instead, scenes with Dietrich ‘repertory actors’ like Eric Falk, Roman Huber and Peggy Markoff were shot back in Zürich the following month. Perhaps the price of airfare made filming them on location impractical? Or perhaps, given Franco's habit of squirrelling footage away for use elsewhere, the presence of actors loyal to Dietrich would have ‘cramped his style’?

Music: Daniel White was contracted to provide music for the film, but although he duly recorded roughly an hour's worth of music, for some reason most of it went unused. The only exception was a jaunty little jazz number with a scatty female vocal sung in a vague simulation of English. The rest of the soundtrack was culled from the same Walter Baumgartner library cues that would proliferate in all of Franco's future films for Dietrich, indeed many of them can also be heard in Dietrich's own films. For instance, *Downtown*'s title theme was used for the opening credits of Dietrich's *Frauen, die für Sex bezahlen* (1974).

Locations: Allegedly set on the island of Porto Santo, the north-easternmost island of the Madeira archipelago, *Downtown* was actually shot in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, the same French resort seen in *Women Behind Bars*. The gleaming white casino on Avenue Fernand Dunan can be seen in both films. When Pereira has a bath with his friend Rita and then walks into her living room, we can see from the view outside that we're in the same room at the Don Gregorio hotel (overlooking Beaulieu-sur-Mer railway station) that was used as Milton Warren's hotel room in *Women Behind Bars*, which means that these two films were almost certainly shot concurrently.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: 1. Cynthia Ramos (Lina Romay) knows how to catch the eye of hard-up private dick Al Pereira (Jess Franco). 2. Pereira greets barmaid Rita (Beni Cardoso), his friend and occasional bedfellow. 3. Drunk and stoned out of his mind, Carlos Rivas (Eric Falk) gets the funny feeling the mirror is watching him. And he's right: behind the one way glass Pereira is taking photos to help Cynthia and Lola (Martine Stedil, left) blackmail their visitor. 4 & 5. Cynthia performs her erotic cabaret. 6. After realising he's been conned, Pereira tries getting tough with Cynthia, unaware that Lola is about to intervene.



LEFT COLUMN: Jess Franco as Al Pereira in Downtown. RIGHT COLUMN: German stills for Die Sklavinnen: (1) Minou (Aida Vargas) and one of Radeck's thugs (Franco) torture Arminda (Lina Romay). (2) Martine (Martine Stedil) falls for her captor Raymond (Ramón Ardid). (3) Martine's father Amos Radeck (Vitor Mendes) with his lover Minou.

The exterior of Cynthia's palatial villa is in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, at the junction of Boulevard du Maréchal Leclerc and Rue de Port. When we meet the real Mrs. Ramos (played by Monica Swinn), the interior of her home is the prison warden's reception room in *Women Behind Bars* and the Governor's abode in *Barbed Wire Dolls*. (This location is one of the few directly linking *Women Behind Bars* and *Barbed Wire Dolls*, two films with a torrid background history – see reviews.) All the scenes in Lola's apartment were shot on a set at Erwin Dietrich's studio in Zürich.

Connections: Al Pereira is back, following his Howard Vernon incarnation in 1972's *Les Ébranlées ...*. When Pereira visits Cynthia backstage at the nightclub where she works as a stripper, stills of Romay performing in her most recent pictures – *Midnight Party*, *Shining Sex* and *Julietta 69* – are pinned to the wall.

Other versions: No known variants exist. An alternative title *Les Bas-Fonds* (The Lower Depths) has been reported, but I've been unable to verify it. (This is also the title of a 1936 film by Jean Renoir, starring Jean Gabin, based on a play by Maxim Gorky.)

DIE SKLAVINNEN

(West German theatrical title)

Switzerland, 1975

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Die Sklavinnen (SWI/WG) *The Slave Girls*

Alternative titles

Die Verschleppten (WG video) *The Abducted*

Die Sexhändler (WG alt. video) *The Sex Traders*

Violated Women (1978 trade title reported in *Variety*)

Unconfirmed titles

Entführt Verführt Die Sklavinnen* (SWI stills title)

Abducted Seduced The Slaves

Des mains blanches sur la peau noir** (shooting title)

White skin on black thighs

* Probably an ad-line attached to the title by the graphic designer: the Swiss pressbook uses the ad-line "Entführt-Verführt, Gewalt an Frauen" ('Abducted Seduced, Violence Against Women').

** Later recycled in German for a different Franco film, *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*, in 1976.

Production company

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (SW/West Germany)

Timeline

Contracts signed	12 August	1975
Shooting in Beaulieu-sur-Mer	18-25 August	1975
Shooting on sets in Zürich	September	1975
More material on sets in Zürich	March	1976
Portuguese shooting	November	1976
German 18-cert 49023 issued	05 April	1977
Germany	15 April	1977
Zürich	August	1977

* during the shoot for *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*.

Theatrical running time

Switzerland	75m
Germany	75m13s

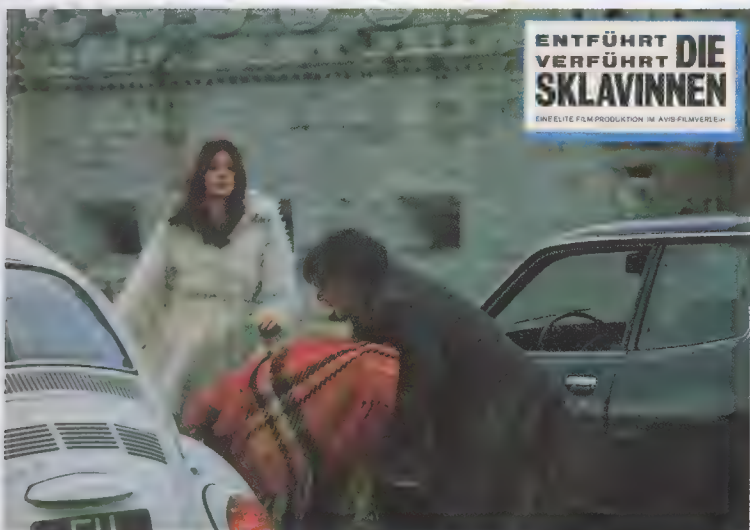
Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	76m07s
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director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. director of photography (France): **Jess Franco**. camera operator (France): **Jess Franco**. director of photography (Switzerland & Portugal): **Peter Baumgartner**. production manager (Switzerland & Portugal): **Max Dora**. executive producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. An **Elite Film** production released by **Avis-Filmverleih**. World sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich). *Uncredited*: assistant director (France): **Gerald Cazal**. still photographer: **Ramón Ardid**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Madame/Princess Arminda). **Aida Vargas** (Minou, Amos Radeck's girlfriend). **Martine Stedil** (Martine Radeck). **Vítor Mendes** (Amos Radeck). **Esther Moser** (Marta). *Uncredited*: **Jesús Franco** (Radeck's chief henchman). **Ramón Ardid** (Raymond, Arminda's sidekick). **Sigad Sharaf** [aka 'Sigart Sharaf'] (Ebenholz, black female crime boss). **Peggy Markoff** (Vicky, an agent of Ebenholz). **Ronald Weiss** (Rock, an S&M client who works for Ebenholz). **Aida Gouveia** (Lola, woman who escapes from prison with Arminda). **Diotta Fatou** (Tanga, nude dancer at Pagoda). **Eric Falk** (man reporting on Arminda's activities to Ebenholz). **Roman Huber** (balding man dancing with Vicky at the Pagoda). **Karl Gysling** (police sergeant). **Paul Nussbaumer** (José, the police sergeant's gopher). **Mike Lederer**.

Synopsis: *A woman called Marta escapes from a sex ring, revealing to her rescuers that she has been kidnapped, drugged and tortured by a cruel trafficker called Princess Arminda. Already known to police as the proprietor of a notorious sex club called The Pagoda, Arminda has so far eluded arrest thanks to her friends in high places. Marta's testimony provides the police with the evidence they need, and Arminda is sent to prison on charges of white slavery, drug trafficking and murder. However, she quickly escapes thanks to the intervention of millionaire*



TOP ROW: Lola (Aida Gouveia) confronts Rock, a character originally played by Ronald Weiss in scenes shot in the South of France in 1975, but played by an unnamed stand-in for this scene, filmed a year later in Portugal. The stand-in's face is clearly visible in the second of these shots!
MIDDLE ROW: Jess Franco bundles another plot contrivance - sorry, character - into the movie, observed by Aida Vargas; Martine Stedil's Portuguese stand-in playing dead on the rocks at the Boca do Inferno ('Mouth of Hell'), Cascais.
BOTTOM ROW: Ruthless millionaire Amos Radeck (Vitor Mendes), and his sadistic assistant (Jess Franco) leave Arminda for dead; these scenes were shot in Portugal, during the shoot for Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun, at the gardens of the Palacio de Monserrate, Sintra.

Amos Radeck. It turns out his motives are less than cordial: he believes that Arminda is responsible for the kidnapping of his daughter Martine [not to be confused with Marta]. Radeck paid a \$5 million ransom but Martine was not handed back to him. Arminda denies the accusation, and while being tortured by Radeck's right hand man, tells the story of how she met and 'fell in love' with Martine before tiring of her and drugging her with mescaline, in order to break her down and make her into a sex slave for The Pagoda...

Production notes: *Die Sklavinnen* is a complex tapestry of material culled from four different shoots spread out over fifteen months. It began life in Beaulieu-sur-Mer in the South of France in August 1975, during the making of *Downtown* and *Die Marquise von Sade*. With roughly seventeen minutes in the can Franco moved on, intending to add more material later (as he'd done in 1973/74 when he'd patched together films such as *Female Vampire* and *The Hot Nights of Linda* from shoots spread out over several months). *Die Sklavinnen*'s divided schedule is evident in the film's photographic quality; parts of it have the careful framing and glossy appearance typical of Dietrich's principal cinematographer Peter Baumgartner, while other sections have a looser, grainier, more Francoesque touch, with frequent hand-held shots, odd angles, and a tendency to film in lower light conditions, suggestive of a smaller shoot with probably no more than three people as 'crew' (the film stock in these shots has the same grainy texture as *Downtown*, as well as sharing cast and locations with that film). The Beaulieu-sur-Mer material, shot by Franco himself, comprises the following scenes:

1. Vicky (Peggy Markoff) and Arminda (Lina Romay) in bed with Martine (Martine Stedil).
2. Martine refusing to sleep with a client at the Pagoda Club.
3. Vicky and Rock (Ronald Weiss) discussing the abduction of Martine (two scenes).
4. Vicky trying to persuade the brainwashed Martine to run away with her.
5. Raymond (Ramón Ardid) and Arminda molesting Martine and demanding to know who her father is.
6. Raymond walking down a glass-ceilinged corridor past an old motor-scooter.
7. Raymond and Arminda breaking into Vicky's apartment to murder her.
8. Rock abducting Martine from the room where Raymond and Arminda were questioning her.

In September 1975, Martine Stedil flew to Dietrich's Zürich studio and filmed some interior scenes with Ramón Ardid and Lina Romay. These shots must have been collected during studio filming for *Barbed Wire Dolls*, which also featured Stedil; we can prove it by comparing the scene in which Martine wakes up to hear Arminda and Raymond in the next room with the incestuous flashback scene in *Barbed Wire Dolls*. Not only do both scenes take

place in the same studio set, but the props on the coffee table and bedside cabinet are positioned identically. In other words, these scenes were not just filmed on the same set; they were probably filmed on the same day! The presence of Ramón Ardid helps to pin down the shooting period too: Ardid left the Franco repertory group in December 1975 and never appeared in a Franco film again (see *Mandinga*), so *Die Sklavinnen*'s studio material must have been shot in the late summer or autumn of 1975.

Working through the material in chronological shooting order, we come to a second bout of studio material, this time shot in March 1976 during the making of *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*. It's doubtful that this footage, featuring black dancer Diotta Fatou, was specifically intended for *Die Sklavinnen*: instead it was probably culled, at a later date, from takes that were not used in their entirety in *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*.

A few months later, in November 1976, Franco shot a great deal more footage for *Die Sklavinnen* in Portugal, while making another film, the lavish and relatively expensive *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*. These new sequences, which comprise the lion's share of *Die Sklavinnen*, were filmed entirely with Erwin Dietrich's blessing, and as already noted are distinguishable by the relatively clean and clear photographic style typical of Dietrich's right hand man and dp, Peter Baumgartner. I spoke to Davide Raimundo Quintans, the (uncredited) art director on *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, and he confirmed that Franco shot extra material during the *Portuguese Nun* shoot: "After the end of each day's shooting, usually with 'leftovers', he filmed another movie that only he had in his head, and from these leftovers he did another movie, *Die Sklavinnen*. I had fun watching this movie when I found it on the internet!"

Some good old fashioned movie trickery was required to suture these disparate shooting periods into a single narrative. For instance, in order to resolve the various plot strands, the characters played by Martine Stedil and Ronald Weiss (namely 'Martine Radeck' and 'Rock') were written into scenes picked up during the 1976 Portuguese shoot. On such a tight budget, however, it was out of the question to fly Stedil and Weiss from their homes in the South of France to the Portuguese location. Instead, Franco replaced them with lookalikes who keep their distance from the camera or hide their faces, à la Bela Lugosi in *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. A shot of Rock in a dark suit and trilby running up a grassy slope towards the Palacio de Monserrate, another shot of him carrying the unconscious Martine from the building, and the scene in which he is gunned down, are all carefully composed to keep the replacement actor in long shot or fleeting sidelong medium shot, while the woman playing Martine is kept hidden except for her dangling legs. Later, we see the murdered 'Martine' sprawled naked on the rocks. Despite the actress being face down, it's clearly not Martine Stedil: her hair is quite different. (Having gone to all this trouble, however, the illusion is then hilariously blown in the German stills for *Die Sklavinnen*: the photographer has blithely snapped a couple of shots which clearly reveal the face of Ronald Weiss's stand-in!)

Review: *Die Sklavinnen* tells a sordid, cynical tale of sexual exploitation, and it's typical of the darkness of the films Franco was making at the time that the chief protagonist should be a thoroughly despicable slave trader, who romantically seduces a young woman before drugging her with mescaline and turning her into a brainwashed sex slave. However, whilst the film's dark heart is the drugging and rape of a young woman, none of this nefarious chemical dosing translates into hallucinatory imagery. Instead there's a pervading seediness and cynicism, with Franco drawing upon his love of hardboiled crime fiction to depict a world of shady sex traffickers, businessmen with gangland connections and faceless clients willing to pay for abusive sex at upmarket brothels.

Partly because of the film's split production period, the time-frame of the story is haphazard and puzzling, especially near the beginning. Marta's escape from Arminda is followed swiftly by Arminda's escape from prison, leaving no time for scenes of Arminda's arrest, trial, or imprisonment. This of course is typical of Franco's more financially straitened productions, in which potentially expensive sequences requiring crowds or difficult-to-secure locations are skipped over. Nevertheless, a little more connective tissue would have helped a great deal. The pre-credits sequence sets up Marta as the focus of our attention, but once the credits are over the poor girl is simply abandoned and we never see her again! Instead, Arminda becomes the focus of the story, delivering her version of events in voice-over. We first hear her speaking, without explanation, as if she's talking directly to us; later she delivers a second voice-over, describing her life with a girl called Martine (no relation to Marta) to the girl's rich father, Amos Radeck. Her account, however, is a tissue of lies. When Radeck realises this, he has his enforcers (Jess Franco and Aida Vargas) pin her to the sofa and stub cigarettes out on her breasts to inspire a more truthful account. We then hear a *third* voice-over from Arminda, over a flashback which reveals what really happened to Martine. The flashback, however, soon digresses to include events that Arminda knew nothing about, leaving the film's narrative hopelessly incoherent. The worst casualty of all this confusion is poor Martine, whose fate occupies so much of the film's attention: in the flurry of activity that brings the story to its ramshackle climax, she is abducted from one abusive couple (Arminda and Raymond) by another (Rock, acting on behalf of his boss, Ebenholz). Attentive viewers will notice that as Martine is carried from an indoor location (in the South of France) to an outdoor location (in Portugal) she's suddenly wearing, in the blink of an eye, a pair of black knee-length boots. Arminda then heads for a cave by the sea where Martine is supposed to have been hidden by Ebenholz, only to see, in long shot, a blonde woman wearing nothing but those black boots lying dead face-down on the rocks. The actor playing the corpse is clearly not Martine Stedil (see Production Notes), so Franco has minted a brand new cinematic concept – the deliberate continuity error – to try and suture the gap!

Die Sklavinnen may struggle to cohere but that's not to say there's nothing in its favour. The scenes in which Franco tortures

Romay – with a lit cigarette, or by half-drowning her in a bathtub – are nasty but also fascinating, as we watch the two of them acting out a sadistic scenario, eyeball to eyeball, with Franco almost daring his favourite actress to 'corpse' as he snarls in her face. In this case the inspiration for the cruelty comes not from De Sade or the horror genre but from lurid American crime magazines like *Startling Detective*, *Master Detective*, *Front Page Detective*, or (my favourite) *Spicy Detective*. And of course, it feeds the amoral vibe of Franco's work for Dietrich that Arminda is herself a monster, who has deliberately brainwashed any number of young women into becoming sex slaves for the wealthy clientele of the Pagoda Club. *Die Sklavinnen* is therefore a continuation of the tone and genre predilections of *Downtown*, but with a much greater tendency towards cruelty.

Romay is on good form as Arminda the evil sex trafficker, and her lesbian seduction of the inexperienced Martine is a masterclass in how casual nakedness can express power, not vulnerability. Romay is in total control as she strips off her clothes and stands nude before the camera. There's something vital, self-confident and unabashed about her; she genuinely loves to be watched. Her candour as a performer is absolute, and lends even the minor films in which she appears a commanding female presence. Martine Stedil is noteworthy too, giving it lots of energy in the most effective and disturbing scene, in which she refuses to leave the sex club with a female rescuer. Totally brainwashed and quite deranged, she insists she wants to stay, yelling "*Lick me!*" at the woman trying to help her. The rest of the cast are just serviceable: Eric Falk gets the funniest scene, harassed by a talking parrot (voiced by Franco, naturally) as he makes out with Ebenholz, a black female crime boss whose underdeveloped role in the story remains largely opaque.

Much as I enjoy screen violence, one scene that I wish Franco had *not* indulged in is the rape of Marta (Esther Moser): not because I object to rape in the movies per se, but because Marta comes to enjoy being attacked. Being the new arrival at the Pagoda, she is raped by two men to 'initiate' her, and although she screams and protests throughout the assault, the scene climaxes with her moaning "*Please, don't stop!*" It's a moment of stupidity that would leave a bad taste in the mouth were it not for the fact that the victim's enormous white leather platform boots, kicking furiously up and down in the air as her legs encircle her attacker, have already robbed the scene of shock value, credibility or intensity. The 1970s really were another country...

Franco on screen: In addition to voicing the parrot, Franco appears onscreen as Radeck's sadistic sidekick, coldly stubbing out cigarettes on Arminda's breasts to elicit information. "*Do you think that your tits will still get attention once they're full of little burns?*" he smirks. While we don't see burning flesh, or even the cigarette making contact, the scene has a startling nastiness, undercut knowingly by the interpolation of a comic book image depicting a superhero saying "I've got to get out of here!" while being menaced by giant pincers!

Cast and crew: Fresh from the shoot for *Women Behind Bars*, where he played the verminous Colonel du Bries, Ronald Weiss here plays an S&M freak cum private investigator looking for Martine Radeck.

Music: The usual selection of cuts from the Baumgartner sound archive. The standout this time is a funky piece playing at the Pagoda during the scene in which we first meet Eric Falk's character; the guitar, bass and drums jab and peek at each other in a way that recalls Can or electric Miles Davis.

Locations: The exterior shots during the pre-credits sequence (depicting a car driving along a narrow path beside a canal surrounded by lush vegetation) revisit a Portuguese location last seen in *The Devil Came from Akasava* (during the shooting of Professor Forrester's assistant) ... The Belém Tower in Lisbon appears again (see *Succubus*), briefly but gloriously, in a rain-swept shot after Arminda's escape from prison ... Lisbon's Ponte 25 de Abril, a suspension bridge spanning the mouth of the River Tagus, can be seen in the early scenes of Arminda's escape from prison. (The bridge was named to commemorate the 'Carnation Revolution' which took place in Portugal on the 25th April 1974) ... A long shot of the Bugio lighthouse, a tiny island just offshore from Lisbon, is cheekily made to stand in for Snake Island, the prison where Arminda is detained ... The prison from which Arminda escapes (which looks a bit like the one in *Barbed Wire Dolls*, but isn't) is the Forte de São Julião da Barra, near the mouth of the Tagus in Lisbon ... The Ritz Hotel in Lisbon, featured in several close-ups, does indeed appear to have been the location for the hotel-room torture scenes, as one can clearly see the nearby monument to the Marques de Pombal out of the window ... The Pagoda Brothel is actually the Palacio de Monserrate in Sintra, Portugal, making the Pagoda surely the most well-appointed and architecturally lavish brothel in the world? ... The rocky coastline where Arminda finds the dead body of Martine is a well known tourist spot called the Boca do inferno ('Hell's Mouth'), located in Cascais, Portugal, less than a mile away from the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães where much of *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* was shot. Such close proximity meant that Franco could simply walk there and pick up shots for *Die Sklavinnen* after concluding a day's work on the other film. (The same location was previously used in *Julietta 69* for the scenes in which Julietta contemplates suicide.) ... An architectural folly in the grounds of the Palacio de Monserrate is the location for the ransom-drop finale.

UK theatrical release: *Die Sklavinnen* appears not to have played in British sex cinemas. However, it's easy to get it mixed up with another Franco film of the Dietrich period, *Satanic Sisters*, which played in the UK as *Swedish Nympho Slaves*; some sources, including German DVD merchants, have used *Swedish Nympho Slaves* as an alternate title for *Die Sklavinnen*. The UK poster for *Swedish Nympho Slaves*, however, makes it clear that the film is actually *Satanic Sisters* – the two actresses credited are the stars of that film, Karine Gambier and Pamela Stanford, neither of whom appear in *Die Sklavinnen*. To make things more complicated,

when *Die Sklavinnen* was released on Swiss DVD by Ascot, many retailers erroneously listed the film's English-language title as *Swedish Nympho Slaves*.

Connections: A member of the omnipresent Radeck clan (last mentioned in *Midnight Party*) turns up as a millionaire hunting his kidnapped daughter ... Arminda is evidently a regal name in the Franco canon; here it's the name of a self-styled Princess, whilst in *The Lustful Amazon* (1973) it was the name of the Amazon queen played by Alice Arno ... The rape of Marta, which ends with the victim begging for more, recalls a similarly dumb and reprehensible scene in *99 Women* in which Maria Röhm ends up enjoying a prison rape. In both cases the problem is not that the scene is 'transgressive' – it simply lacks the guts to 'own' the dark side of rape fantasy and offers the get-out clause of 'the bitch likes it really' so that no one need feel too scummy for getting turned on ... Ronald Weiss reads a French edition of Merriam Modell's novel *Bunny Lake is Missing*, about a woman searching for her abducted daughter.

Other versions: The German video version called *Die Verschleppten* features an additional six seconds of Martine Stedil sobbing into her mattress after being interrogated by Romay and Ardid that is missing from the official DVD release. However, *Die Verschleppten* also cuts a minute and a half of the prologue (Esther Moser's escape through the forest) and trims most of the sex scenes by a few seconds each, making it undesirable for all but the most eager collector.

Problematica: The titles *Les flagellées de la cellule 69* and *De Gegeselde Vrouwen van Cel 69* are sometimes attributed to this film; they are in fact the Belgian (French & Dutch) theatrical titles for *Women Behind Bars*, with confusion arising from the fact that the only actors credited on the posters – Lina Romay, Martine Stedil (as 'Martine Steed') and Ronald Weiss – appear in both. There are no actual 'women in prison' scenes in *Die Sklavinnen* to justify the title reference to 'Cell 69', and flagellation is a major selling point of *Women Behind Bars*, not *Die Sklavinnen*.

DIE MARQUISE VON SADE

(SWI/WG hardcore title/Blu-ray title)

Switzerland, 1975

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray (SWI/WG softcore version)

Alternative titles

La porno storia della Marchesa De Sade (IT theatrical)

The Porno Story of the Marquise de Sade

Marquise de Sade (WG video/DVD cover)

Die Marquise de Sade (SWI pressbook)

Doriana Gray (GER & SWI DVD cover)
Dirty Dracula (shooting title)
The Portrait of Doriana Grey (pre-release title in Dietrich's English-language correspondence)

Unconfirmed titles

Les Avaleuses N°. 2 (source: Petit)
Ejaculations (source: Petit)
Dirty Vampire (source: Petit)

Production company

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (SW/West Germany)

Timeline

Shooting in Beaulieu-sur-Mer	18-25 August	1975
Contracts signed	15 September	1975
Shooting on sets in Zürich	September	1975
Germany	circa	1976
German X-cert release		1977
Sanremo (Italy)	26 October	1982

Theatrical running time

Germany (as <i>Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray</i>)	69m35s
Germany (X-rated as <i>Die Marquise von Sade</i>)	76m

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	78m58s
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director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khunne': SWI pressbook]. camera operator (France): **Jess Franco**. An **Elite Film** Production. screenplay: **Jess Franco**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. assistant director (France): **Gerald Cazal**. still photographer: **Ramón Ardid**. negative: **Geyer Werke Laboratory** (Berlin).

Cast: **Lina Romain** (Lady Doriana Gray/her twin sister). **Monica Swinn** (the American journalist). **Peggy Markoff** (an artist). **Ramón Ardid** (Xiros, Doriana's servant). **Martine Stedil** (Xiros's girlfriend). **Ronald Weiss** (Dr. Orloff). SWI pressbook adds: **Christa Lang**. MF adds: Andréa Rigano. Peter Lusehand. Alex Anglowitz. (Note: Although the latter three names are listed in *Obsession* and *The Manacoa Files*, there is in fact only one role in the film unaccounted for – the nurse looking after Doriana's sister. Given the cast-list in the Swiss pressbook I suspect that Christa Lang plays this character. (There is a Christa Lang who appeared in French films of the 1960s but I can't see any resemblance.) The actress playing the nurse also appears in *Women Behind Bars* as the character 'Maria Rincon'. *Obsession* also lists Martine Stedil's character as 'Irina', although there's no mention of her name in the English-language dialogue.)

Synopsis: Lady Doriana Gray lives alone except for her mute manservant Xiros, in a magnificent Portuguese chateau, the extensive grounds of which are filled with lush, verdant plant-life. Each morning she walks alone through this Eden, while her thoughts turn to her twin sister, who is incarcerated in a sanatorium in the town (run, we are told, by "the mysterious Dr. Orloff"). A foreign female journalist enters the abode, seeking an interview for a women's magazine. The visitor asks about Doriana's twin sister, and Doriana opens up, telling of her life. She explains that when she and her twin were separated at birth, irreversible damage was done to her nerves, meaning she can never experience physical passion. Her twin sister, meanwhile, is an insane nymphomaniac...

Production notes: Having shot most of *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Downtown*, plus a few minutes of *Die Sklavinnen* (which was then being referred to as *Weisse Haut auf Schwarzen Schenkeln*), Franco was unable to resist the siren call of another idea – and thus was born *Die Marquise von Sade*, first released in its softcore version as *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*. Monica Swinn, who starred in the film alongside Lina Romain, spoke about the shooting period in *Obsession*: "Frauengefängnis [*Barbed Wire Dolls*] and *Downtown* were begun in Beaulieu, near Nice, and in the fort at Antibes. [Franco] was also shooting inserts for earlier films, or for ones he was about to make for other producers, of course. As a result the shoot was very bizarre; we kept redoing scenes for no particular reason."¹ Splitting hairs over the precise shooting order is probably not worth it in this case: it really does seem as though the summer of 1975 was one long production block, during which Franco shot material more or less simultaneously for five different films: three which he was contracted for by Erwin Dietrich (*Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Downtown*, *Die Sklavinnen*), one which he shot clandestinely (*Women Behind Bars*) and another which he shot 'on impulse' (*Die Marquise von Sade*). *Die Marquise von Sade* features a tiny cast – Lina Romain, Monica Swinn, Martine Stedil, Ronald Weiss, Peggy Markoff and Ramón Ardid – all of whom, with the exception of Swinn, appeared in *Frauengefängnis*, *Downtown* and *Die Sklavinnen* too. Ronald Weiss looks identical to his appearance in *Die Sklavinnen*, wearing the same sinister black sunglasses, while Lina wears the same chiffon gown in both films. All of this supports the notion that Franco's first four Dietrich films (*Frauengefängnis*, *Downtown*, *Sklavinnen*, *Doriana*) were made, or at least begun, in very quick succession. When shooting actually took place, *Doriana* was not subject to any prior contract with Dietrich: Franco appears to have filmed it 'spontaneously' on location in the South of France, and then, after returning to Switzerland to shoot interiors on *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Downtown*, offered it to Dietrich. The two then signed an agreement for *Doriana* on 15 September 1975.² However, owing to its hardcore explicitness, Dietrich found the film hard to market through his usual channels. It played the German 'X' certificate circuit in 1977 (specifics are hard to ascertain), and saw a release in Italy in 1982 as *La porno storia della Marchesa De Sade*, but otherwise it was for a long time one of the more obscure titles in the Dietrich catalogue.



DAS BILDNIS DER DORIANA GRAY



DAS BILDNIS DER DORIANA GRAY



DAS BILDNIS DER DORIANA GRAY

THIS PAGE, from *Die Marquise von Sade*, aka *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*, clockwise from top:

(1) Doriana (Lina Romay) in her luxurious bathroom (filmed at the Villa Kerylos in Beaulieu-sur-Mer).

(2) Doriana roams her villa, a lonely demon in search of pleasures endlessly denied.

(3) Doriana's nameless twin, incarcerated in a sanatorium, deranged by the murderous sexual sensations which her sister cannot feel.

Documentation from the Elite Film archives shows that Erwin Dietrich was made aware of the existence of *Die Marquise von Sade* (then being referred to as *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*) no later than 24 September 1975, at which time he contacted the Italian company B.O.S. Co. to emphasise his ownership of the rights.³ On 4 November 1975, Dietrich wrote to Franco to ascertain when he would be editing the film: "*Delivery of [...] Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray is promised by you for the end of November 1975 and we have included in our plans the editing [...] in Berlin for this date. Please inform Avco Film [...] of the date on which you or Mr. Ramon plan to go to Berlin to proceed to the rough cut. Avco Film will then reserve you an editing room and, if you wish, an assistant.*"⁴ On 15 January 1976, Dietrich wrote to Franco again: "*At the request of Mr. Ardid, we sent the working copy of the film to Nice. The airline company now informs us that this shipment has not been removed and wants to send it back to Berlin, if nothing happens in the next few days. Please, therefore, act without delay and as soon as possible, so that this re-expedition does not take place.*"⁵ Franco, however, was incommunicado, for reasons the review of *Mandinga* will make clear...

On 2 September 1976, having already come into conflict with French distributors Eurociné regarding the rights to *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Women Behind Bars*, yet more confusion arose when Marius Lesoeur wrote to Erwin Dietrich, laying claim to *Doriana Gray*: "*I take this opportunity to inform you that we have learned that you have sold the rights to the film Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray for the territories of Belgium, Luxembourg and Canada. I guess it's by mistake because you know that we own the rights to these territories. For all intents and purposes, I tell you once again that we hold the rights to these four films: Filles en cage [Frauengefängnis], Portrait de Doriana Gray, Des attouchements chauds [Midnight Party], Peau blanche sur les cuisses noires [White Skin on Black Thighs], for the territories of France, Ex-Union, Former French colonies, Haiti, Benelux, French-speaking Canada, Greece, Lebanon, Jordan [...] Finally, I hope to see you very soon in Zurich, where I would also like to meet Mr. Franco in your presence.*"⁶ If this meeting ever took place it would have been worth buying tickets to watch, because the fireworks must have been spectacular...

Review: *Die Marquise von Sade* is by far the most personal, the most beautiful, and the most gynaecologically explicit film Franco made for producer Erwin Dietrich. Building on elements from *La comtesse noire*, he delivers a mesmerising work that seems to exist outside of normal narrative time, a pure blast of Franco magic which revisits his obsessive theme of the purgatorial nature of lust, and the delicious hell of insatiability.

Doriana Gray is a sad, sombre, beautiful young woman who lives with just a single male servant for company. One day, a female journalist arrives at Doriana's palatial residence: she's the editor of 'Women of Today', a magazine dedicated to the feminist movement. She's interested in meeting Doriana because she's heard that she prefers lesbian lovers, and has "*succeeded in barring all male influence*" from her life. We learn that Doriana has

an identical twin sister, whose name we never learn, and who is incarcerated at a secluded private clinic on account of her violent fits and convulsions, apparently caused by intense sexual arousal. The twins, it seems, are psychically linked but physically isolated; Doriana never visits her sister.

As played by the ever-wonderful Monica Swinn, the journalist (who also remains nameless throughout the film) has a magisterial poise to her physical demeanour, which makes her blunt questions about Doriana's personal life all the more surprising. Enquiring about Doriana's twin sister, she says, "*Rumour has it that [...] you keep her locked away against her will, because you can't bear the thought of another person who looks like you, whose beauty however is less fragile than yours.*" Fortunately, Doriana is not offended, and the women trade further comments which nurture a strengthening bond between them. Doriana tells her guest, "*I'm endowed with an unlimited lust for pleasure, which is the secret of eternal youth,*" to which the other woman responds, with a zest for flattery which makes amends for her brusque approach earlier, "*You radiate the charm of youth, and the melancholy of experience. Most admirable.*" The relationship between the two women grows more intimate, until Doriana decides to trust the visitor and explain the sad truth about her sister: "*At birth we were brutally separated, through an operation. Unfortunately, some of our nerve fibre was damaged. In my case, all my sexual sensitivity was completely destroyed. My sister lost her mind.*"

This is the crux of the film. Doriana has sexual desires, but she can't achieve orgasm and remains perpetually unsatisfied by the acts to which her desires drive her – acts which climax with the death of the other party. Her sister, on the other hand, is psychically linked to her sibling, and experiences Doriana's 'missing' pleasure (and her victims' erotic agonies) flooding through her body, the intensity of which drives her to violent fits and uncontrollable ecstasies, rolling around on a bed clawing frantically at her sex. She must live her days in a sanatorium, constantly inflamed by the activities of her murderous sister.

Doriana can kill people just by arousing them, but while there's a hint of vampirism to this, there are no fangs, no puncture wounds, and definitely no blood: she's essentially a kind of succubus. When the journalist finally gives in to the temptation that's been rising within her, by kissing Doriana and touching her breasts, we get the briefest hint of Doriana's dark side: she bares her teeth slightly, and bites the woman's lip, to the accompaniment of a hissing exhalation on the soundtrack that connects what we're seeing to the vampire myth. However, that's as much as we get in terms of classic vampire symbolism: no fangs, no blood from the neck, and certainly no garlic or crucifixes. Franco is at his most determinedly abstract here: Doriana's only 'tool of the trade' is her magnetic aura of sexuality. The supernatural is manifested in her 'paranormal' ability to exert her will across empty space, or drain someone's life-force with an erotic caress.

This conflation of erotic arousal with depletion and/or death by supernatural forces echoes another film, *Shining Sex*, made by Franco just a few months earlier. It's striking that he wrote

two scenarios linking sexual attraction and death in fairly quick succession, and in both cases the actor who personifies that dangerous mixture is Lina Romay. Was he writing, consciously or unconsciously, about the siren pull of Lina's real-life sexual magnetism? Remember that in 1975 Franco was still married to Nicole Guettard, and Lina was married to Ramón Ardid. According to Antonio Mayans (see interview p.483), Franco and Romay first consummated their mutual attraction in the autumn of 1973, during the production of *Night of the Assassins*, but as far as their spouses were concerned the relationship was simply that of a voyeuristic film director and his exhibitionist muse. It may seem unlikely, given the free-and-easy attitudes in Franco's films, that he was dedicated to maintaining bourgeois codes of behaviour, but who knows – perhaps the restraining bonds of marriage were at war with Franco's desire for his leading lady? In *Shining Sex* and *Die Marquise von Sade*, Lina can kill with an erotic carress; in *Downtown*, which is full of innuendo about their relationship, she's a femme fatale who seduces and ensnares Franco himself (playing a private eye). These three films were made within four months of each other. Two earlier films also featured Franco playing characters intensely fascinated by Lina Romay: in *Exorcism* (1974), he plays the murderer Vogel who abducts Romay's character and treats her as a 'debased innocent' who must be punished; in *Julietta 69* (1974/5) he plays a lonely voyeur, terrified of physical contact, who masturbates while Romay strips for him. The line between fantasy and reality was becoming ever more smudged and indistinct, and by depicting Romay twice in the space of four months as a woman of supernatural sexual powers, it seems that Franco was struggling subconsciously with the tensions and responsibilities in such a charged situation. With his wife and Romay's husband also working on the set each day, the degree to which Franco's desires were being acted out in full view of the two spouses must have felt both thrillingly daring and insanely risky.

To return to the fictional space of *Die Marquise von Sade*... The script, though sparse, has its subtleties. For instance, when Doriana asks the journalist why she chose her vocation, the visitor answers that it's because the job allows her "to meet people like you." It's intended as flattery – the two women have been drawing physically closer as they talk over a meal. Yet the words, innocently chosen, disturb Doriana, who excuses herself and says she must walk alone in the garden. It seems that the words "people like you" simply remind Doriana of the existence of her twin sister, a woman too much 'like' her for comfort. Such moments are worth noting, but as always the script is not Franco's real focus. This is a film of long, energised silences, charged vacuums rippling with erotic melancholia. Franco repeatedly intercuts sex scenes with shots of Doriana walking through the chateau as rain beats down on the marble tiles of the verandah: his probing camera repeatedly zooming in to see water sluicing against stone, as if to emphasise how sensation bounces off the nerveless shell of Doriana's body.

Presumably because the chief location was available for just a limited time, Franco contrives to get Doriana out of her chateau

and into a hotel room for her first sex scene (some nonsense about the storm lashing her house and keeping her awake). There she meets a brash networking porn actress (played by the irrepressible Peggy Markoff) who introduces herself to Doriana under the mistaken impression that she's meeting 'Madame Lolita', a publisher of erotica. What follows is a lesbian love scene focussing compulsively on cunnilingus, with numerous highly intimate close-ups. Franco gives full expression to his fascination with the vagina, his camera studying orchid fronds and folds like a low-flying aircraft obsessively searching jungle terrain. The scene is long and slow, but it works because Franco is 'in the zone'; the slow movements of the performers, the gentle but insistent caress of the camera, the insinuatingly exotic music (actually a library recording) and the adept editing, perfectly conjure that charmed space of fascination which defines the top tier of Franco's films.

Doriana may think of herself as evil, but she tries not to destroy her new friend, the visiting journalist. Speaking to her manservant, she implores, "Xiros, my dear one, you must help me. I feel the evil rising in me again. My cravings get stronger the more I give in to them. They're consuming me." The 'solution' they hit upon is to use Xiros's girlfriend instead. Doriana visits her, and with Xiros's compliance pins her down and subjects her to an invasive bout of cunnilingus. The rape is intercut with scenes of Doriana's twin at the sanatorium, scratching and digging and grasping at her labia with the incensed panic of one who cannot assuage a terrible, debilitating itch. It's an alarming scene in which Franco gives vent to his most obscene and graphically obsessive depiction of the female sex – stopping short, perhaps, of the surgical extremities in modern-day video pornography, but nevertheless building up an astonishing head of steam as he regards Romay's furious manipulation of the victim's clitoris. We enter once again, via his exhaustively intense camera, an abstract world of shadowy labial folds, surreally magnified hair follicles and amorphous writhing flesh. When the scene ends and Doriana expels a trail of mucus from her mouth, this is as close to an external visualisation of the horror as we get. Yet the fluid is not from the victim, it's from the perpetrator, and it isn't blood, it's spit. The effect is repulsive, because of the eerie sense of displacement rather than a squeamish reaction to saliva. We might expect the ravaged sex to ooze either vaginal juices or blood, but the mouthful of drool which Doriana expels is neither – it signifies a *failure* of sexual release, and is more disturbing than any orgasmic ejaculate would be.

Romay is once again mesmerising to watch, and here we see her in two of her finest roles: an icy 'vampiress' and a deranged nymphomaniac. She's at the height of her sullen beauty, sporting a Louise Brooks hairdo whilst gliding around in various chiffon negligees like someone from Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet's marvellously unsettling *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). *Die Marquise von Sade* is an elegant, languid and fascinating film, as pornographic as anything in Franco's canon but also one of his greatest visual achievements. The only element which I feel detracts from the aesthetic accomplishment is a pink and gold-

striped outfit with harshly rectangular shoulders, worn on several occasions by Romay: intended to be both diaphanous and strangely modernistic, to my eyes it more closely resembles an errant shower curtain. But then, fashion is always the enemy when you're making timeless films! In all other respects this is Franco at his unique, exploratory best, spinning something special out of almost nothing and suspending the viewer in an eerie netherworld of opiated sexuality.

Cast and crew: The striking actress who plays a nurse at the sanatorium also appeared in *Women Behind Bars* playing 'Maria Rincon' (one of the influx of new prisoners alongside Romay's character Shirley Fields). This suggests that all the scenes featuring Dorian's sister in the mental hospital were shot in the South of France during the initial shooting period. Sadly, the actress is unnamed in either film ... Very unusually for a Franco film, we can spot the camera crew reflected in the French windows of Dorian's entrance hall. Franco is behind the camera with what looks like Ramón Ardid, plus one other person. Live sound was clearly used here, because when Monica Swinn enters the room we hear a male voice quietly say "Come on now".

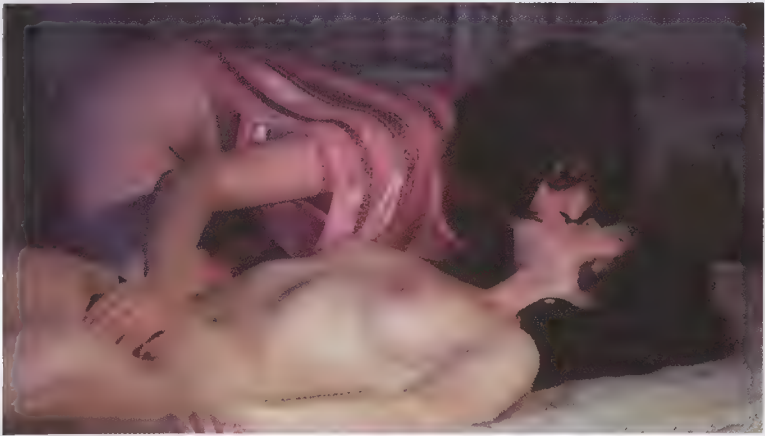
Music: Musically, the dominant texture is a piece for twanging koto and African thumb piano. It's used repeatedly hereafter in the films Franco made for Erwin Dietrich, most notably in *Satanic Sisters*. Here it lends a kabuki-like drama to the slowly moving bodies, and bestows both exoticism and a sense of obscure psychic derangement. It's a shame that some of the later scenes fall back on more typical porno music, but as with all the Dietrich productions, Franco did not have a free hand choosing which pieces to use. Intriguingly though, there's a surprise appearance by a piece of music dating all the way back to a 1965 episode of *The Avengers* called "Honey for the Prince"! (I'm assuming the track was composed by Laurie Johnson, who scored most of the *Avengers* series: perhaps he sold it to a library music company afterwards?). A seductively snaking Eastern melody, it accompanies the arrival of the journalist, and pops up again during the lesbian scene at the hotel. Like most of the cues Franco was forced to use, however, it had already been around in Erwin C. Dietrich's own films as director, popping up as early as 1970 in his pop-industry 'sexposé' *Ich, eine groupie*.

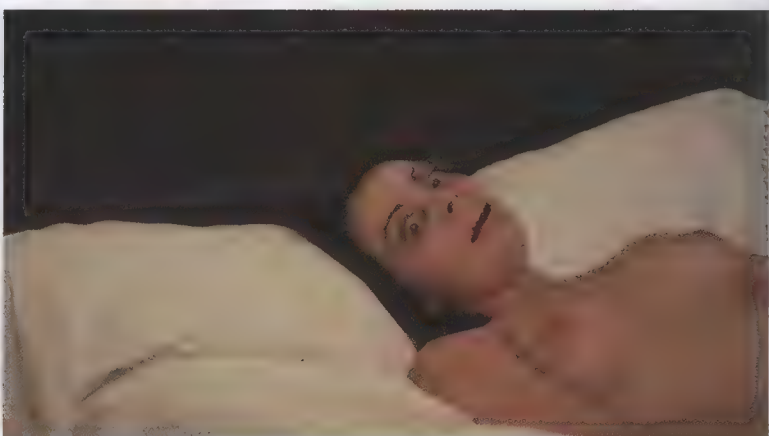
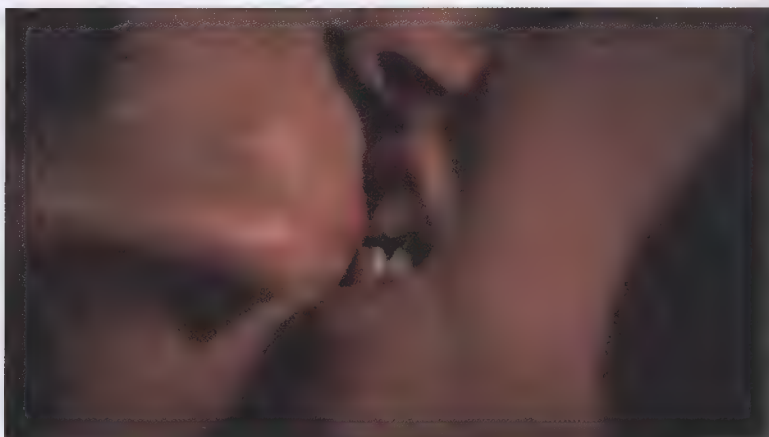
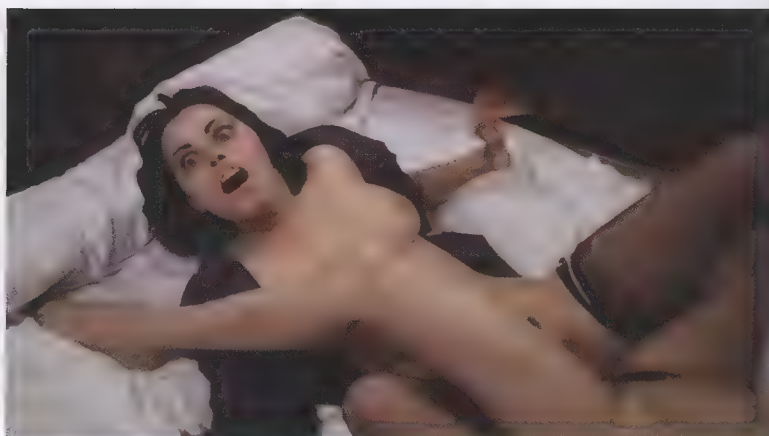
Locations: There were two location shoots for this film, separated by several months or possibly more than a year. One was at the Villa Kerylos in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, France (which provided the interiors for Dorian's home), and the other at the Palacio de Monserrate in the Portuguese town of Sintra (which provided the house exteriors). Villa Kerylos was created in 1908 by an architect called Emmanuel Pontremoli, for the French archaeologist Théodore Reinach. Reinach's love for the architecture of the ancient world was echoed in the design, which integrated influences from Rome, Pompeii and Egypt. His descendants continued to live there until 1967, when the villa was classified as a historic monument. Franco evidently received permission to shoot inside Villa Kerylos for a couple of days when the place was closed to the public. (Incidentally,

Franco seems to have been inspired by the Greek trappings when naming the character Xiros, played by Ramón Ardid.) Further exterior filming took place later, at Monserrate Palace in the beautiful Portuguese town of Sintra. The palace and its grounds offer a sense of incredible luxury and dreamlike isolation, a place for phantoms or obsessions to rise unhindered. Shrouded in rain and mist, it offers the lushness of a tropical forest side by side with all the architectural lavishness 19th century wealth could buy ... The hotel room in which Dorian seduces the porn star is a room at one of Erwin Dietrich's studios in Zürich; the same room and many of the same fixtures and fittings can be seen in *Die Sklavinnen* and *Barbed Wire Dolls*.

Connections: Regarding the softcore version's title, and the lead character's name, to what end do we regard this as truly a version of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? The connections are extremely tenuous. There is no real physical difference between Dorian and her twin, the 'portrait in the attic' effect being restricted to the gulf between Dorian's icy calm and her sister's ranting and raving. Much stronger similarities can be seen with Franco's earlier films *Female Vampire* and *Shining Sex*. The element of a visiting journalist quizzing a woman with supernatural powers about her life carries a strong echo of the former, in which the Countess Irina is approached by a female writer intent on discovering links to the bloodthirsty Karlstein dynasty. The notion of a woman who kills by sexually arousing her victims to the point of death echoes *Shining Sex*, albeit this time removing the sci-fi 'explanation' and leaving the means by which this is achieved completely mysterious. The finale, in which Dorian ends her life in a huge stone bath, echoes the finale of *Female Vampire*.

Other versions: Before releasing the film on the hardcore porn circuit as *Die Marquise von Sade*, Dietrich first released a softcore version called *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray*, which removed all the explicit cunnilingus and penetration. For instance, in place of the close-ups of Markoff's vagina, we cut to a shot of Romay's face, which betrays its later provenance due to the shaggy white bedspread behind her, replacing the red towelling we see in the original footage. Also missing is the scene in which Xiros and his girlfriend make out, removing not only the penetration shots but any glimpses of Ramón Ardid's genitals. A new scene is added to the softcore version, in which Romay descends a spiral staircase in the nude carrying a huge sunflower, which quotes Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" while adding a van Gogh reference into the bargain! (the same staircase can be seen in *Blue Rita* so perhaps the scene was grabbed during the making of that film a few months later? Dietrich was still using this location in 1980 when the same staircase made an appearance in one of his own films as director, *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst*). Other additions peculiar to the softcore version include a close-up of Romay eating the petals from a rose and spitting them out, a shot of her lounging topless in a rocking chair (wearing a mismatched wig), plus a scene in which she gazes out of a rain-streaked window and swings in a hammock smoking a kif pipe. Finally, and rather oddly given the





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Doriana's twin (Lina Romay) is driven to acts of sexual frenzy by a psychic link with her murderous sister.

The sisters make love at the climax of the film.

A vampire kiss? This brief shot of Doriana bearing her teeth during a kiss, and nipping on the lips of the visiting journalist (Monica Swinn), is as close as we get to the standard imagery of the vampire tale.

Sex madness; a favourite topic of Jess Franco's, rendered here with startling intensity by Lina Romay, who drew upon similar reserves of frenzy and derangement for her role in *Lorna... the Exorcist* (1974). One imagines that Franco referenced the earlier film when asking Romay for this performance.

Xiros (Ramón Ardíd), Doriana's servant and sexual partner, becomes a victim of his Mistress's hunger.

Dr. Orloff (Ronald Weiss) consults with his nurse (actress unknown) at the clinic where Doriana's twin is being treated.

So much for journalistic detachment... Monica Swinn's amorous essayist feels the tug of Doriana's overwhelming attraction.

lack of drumming on the soundtrack, there's an additional close-up of someone playing the bongos ... I have always assumed that Jess Franco shot these new scenes, but in a letter to Marius Lesoeur dated 6 September 1976, discussing the rights situation for certain territories, Erwin Dietrich made a startling claim about the film: *"The movie 'Portrait of Dorian Gray' is – after eliminating porn scenes from a film which is already too short – no more than a movie trailer and an end title. I was forced to shoot with Lina Romay, fourteen days ago, large parts of this film to assemble a real movie."*⁷ What he seems to imply is that after removing the hardcore material, he himself shot extra scenes to bring the film up to a releasable length. If this is true, then he only had Lina Romay to work with. Co-star Monica Swinn confirmed to me that she was never directed by Dietrich: *"All the scenes with me were shot at Villa Kerylos in Beaulieu-sur-Mer: and filmed at the same time as the other two films, Frauengefängnis and Downtown."*⁸ Given that Romay appeared in only one Franco film in 1976 (*Jack the Ripper*), it's likely that the additional scenes for *Dorian Gray* were filmed around then, in June 1976.

MANDINGA

UNRELEASED

Italy, 1975

Alternative titles

La Mandinga (shooting title)

Madinga – Die Nackte Sklavin (proposed German release title)

Mandinga – The Naked Slave

Production company

S.E.F.I. Cinematografica (Rome)

Eventual rights holder of the Franco footage

Erwin C. Dietrich

Timeline

Partial shooting date	November	1975
Shooting continues	Dec '75 to early Jan	1976
Dietrich and SEFI contract	18 March	1976

director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Mario Alabiso**. director of photography/camera operator: **Jess Franco**. make-up: **Michèle Goudigen**.

Cast: **William Berger**. **Lina Romay**. **Beni Cardoso**. **Denis Torre**. **Martine Stedil**. **Ramón Ardid**.

Production notes: This failed production was a major disaster for Franco, and cost him dearly on both a personal and financial level. Friendships were destroyed, chickens came home to roost,

and once the dust had settled he found himself in a very different relationship with his producer Erwin Dietrich...

In late November 1975, Franco accepted an offer from an Italian company called S.E.F.I. Cinematografica (possibly with some minor input from Eurociné) to shoot a script titled "Mandinga", essentially a *Mandingo* knock-off concerning black slavery and the erotic undercurrents thereof. Franco and his crew took up residence at the Hotel Le Quetzal in La Grande-Motte in the South of France, while shooting began at the nearby Castle Mogère in Montpellier. Then, in early January, with the film almost completed, Franco disappeared without explanation, taking Romay with him and leaving the cast and crew (including actors Beni Cardoso and Denis Torre, Romay's husband Ramón Ardid, and makeup artist Michèle Goudigen) hanging on at the hotel. After two weeks with no news, the hotel management called the police, who came to interview the stranded production team. Cardoso, Torre and Ardid were advised to file a complaint against Franco or else they'd be personally liable for the mounting hotel costs.

In later interviews, Franco claimed that the budget had dried up and he'd been unable to reach the Italian producers by telephone, so he and Romay took a train to Rome in search of an explanation and/or money. This was as far as he ever went towards explaining what had happened. Erwin Dietrich, however, was more forthcoming, telling Sven Berndt and Thomas Schweer: *"He had a lot of financial troubles, overdue bills he had to pay. Several producers were hunting for him because he still owed them large sums. Every once in a while he just disappeared from the hotel where he was staying without paying the bill, leaving his suitcases and personal belongings behind."*¹ Luckily for Franco, this time Erwin Dietrich stepped in to save the day. He made the necessary apologies, arranged to settle Franco's hotel debt, and retrieved his belongings, which had been impounded by the hotel: *"I can remember once seizing one of his suitcases from a hotel in the South of France from which he had done a moonlight flit. I sent a guy down there to pay Franco's bill and fetch the luggage because Jess told me it contained the negative of a film I had already paid him for. Of course there was no negative in the suitcase!"*²

However, according to Uwe Huber, a negative was in fact retrieved: maybe not in the suitcase but among Franco's abandoned possessions. It represented all that had been shot so far of the third film in Franco's original deal with Erwin Dietrich. Uwe Huber, who knew Dietrich and was granted access to the Elite Film archives, writes, *"The retrieved film cans were indeed the incomplete Die Sklavinnen (known at that time under the title Peau blanc sur cuisses noir – a title later used for another film shot in Zürich). This explains the long gap in the production of Die Sklavinnen. Franco's hotel debts of 14,000 Francs were paid in June 1976 by Dietrich's production manager Edi (Eduard) Stöckli. Stöckli collected the film cans and also brought with him Franco's suitcase, containing a love letter from Lina, his address/phone book, treatments (partly handwritten) for Midnight Party, Shining Sex, Lorna, etc. and some fake fun movie posters drawn (by Alain Petit or by Franco himself?) with titles like 'Lascive' and 'Ejaculation'."*³

So it seems that Franco's story about going to Italy in search of missing funds was, shall we say, the invention of an 'unreliable narrator'. If it really had been the fault of the Italian producers, he would not have needed to make himself scarce. Given that he failed to alert his stranded production crew, it's difficult to avoid the assumption that he 'did a runner' because the financial shortfall was his fault. He never rang the hotel to speak to the cast and crew because he knew how furious they would be when they found out there was no money left to pay them. Bearing in mind Dietrich's observation about "several producers hunting for him", perhaps Franco was personally responsible for the budget drying up. Did an angry creditor from an earlier production track him down to the Hotel Le Quetzal and bang on his door, with a couple of sturdy fellows in tow, demanding immediate payment? Did Franco write a cheque from the *Mandinga* budget to get them off his back? If so, he must have realised that this would not sit well with the *Mandinga* cast and crew still patiently awaiting their money. One imagines Franco and Romay clambering out of a third floor balcony on knotted bed-sheets in the middle of the night, hailing a cab and making a dash for the airport. Going on the run, with his muse Lina Romay by his side, the director must have felt a little like one of his own nefarious characters, as though the criminal scenarios of films like *Downtown*, *Women Behind Bars* and *Midnight Party* were leaking into real life. Perhaps it was even fun, in a reckless and irresponsible sort of way, but it's harder to feel empathy when you realise that they were betraying not just a few strangers but close friends too. Beni Cardoso, a semi-regular in Franco-land since *The Girl from Rio* in 1968, never worked with him again. The biggest betrayal, though, was suffered by Ramón Ardid, Romay's young husband and Franco's friend and business associate. For Romay to run off with Franco like this was a public slap in the face that must have been deeply humiliating for Ardid, as he hung around with the make-up girl and the secondary cast, waiting for his wife to return. Not surprisingly, it was the nail in the coffin of their marriage.

Ramón Ardid first entered Franco's orbit in 1969, taking (uncredited) press photographs of Soledad Miranda during the Barcelona shoot for *Count Dracula*. Franco liked the pictures, and a few months later invited Ardid to take promotional photographs for *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970). As a result, he was also on hand during filming of the unfinished *Juliette* (he took the well-known 'keyhole' photo used to promote *She Killed in Ecstasy* which actually came from the *Juliette* shoot). When Franco set up his production company, Manacoa, he invited Ardid to become his regular photographer. Towards the end of 1972, Franco met Ardid's eighteen-year-old wife, Lina Romay, and immediately realised her immense screen potential. Over the following three years Romay and Ardid became permanent fixtures in the Franco universe. Romay of course became Franco's screen muse, while Ardid moved from stills photographer to assistant cameraman to production secretary, and also became a regular acting presence, being quite willing to strip off and get involved in the

erotic adventures onscreen. By the end of 1975 he'd graduated from general factotum to a trusted plenipotentiary, authorised by Franco to sign documents on Manacoa's behalf. When Franco ran off with Romay, it was the last straw for Ardid, who may already have been uncomfortable with the growing rapport between his wife and Jess Franco (one need only watch *Downtown* to see which way the wind was blowing).⁴

In an interview on the Blue Underground DVD of *Women Behind Bars*, Franco claimed that Romay never acted as though she and Ardid were especially close, the suggestion being that although he may have moved in on another man's wife, the relationship was not so serious in the first place. Is this just the equivocation of a scoundrel? It certainly seems that way, given Monica Swinn's testimony in *Obsession*, which paints a very different picture: "[Ramón] was very nice, it must have been hard for him at times because he was so very much in love with his wife (Lina Romay). He admired Jess a lot..."⁵ Without Ardid's side of the story, the picture remains incomplete, but it seems that Franco's role here was the classic 'wife-stealer'. His subsequent lifelong relationship with Romay may have ameliorated his actions, but his unwillingness to acknowledge the hurt he caused is less than admirable.

But what about the film at the heart of this imbroglio? Earlier accounts of the story claimed that Franco had shot less than half of *Mandinga* before doing his moonlight flit, telling Marian D. Botulino: "I started shooting this film, but had to cancel it because of problems I had with the Italian producers. One of the reasons why I did not want to shoot in Italy anymore."⁶ Newly available documentation, however, suggests otherwise. On 3 January 1976, the film's Italian producers S.E.F.I. wrote to Erwin Dietrich: "We hereby confirm that the film above, on the instructions of Mr. Jesus Franco Manera, is your property for the territories of Germany-Austria-Switzerland; we also confirm that the negative is deposited with the Technicolor laboratory in Rome and that we hereby give you access so that you can make all the copies that you hold necessary for the exploitation of your film in the territories of your skills. We will also send you the international columns in due course, and the list of dialogues to establish your German dubbing."⁷ According to this letter, *Mandinga* was not abandoned unfinished; a viable negative had been deposited in Rome. This makes it clear that Franco's story about the budget drying up was bunkum. On 15 January 1976, Dietrich wrote to Franco at the Hotel Le Quetzal to discuss completion of *Die Marquise von Sade* and *Barbed Wire Dolls*, evidently expecting an answer by return post, but by this time Franco and Romay had done their disappearing act. Two months later however, something had changed. On 18 March, Dietrich wrote this short note, counter-signed by Franco: "I hereby confirm that my request/demand to Mr. Jess Franco Manera in regard to the film *Mandinga* – The Naked Slave has been voided by the conclusion and implementation of the contract with Elite Film AG. I therefore relieve Mr. Franco-Manera completely and utterly."⁸ The following day Franco signed a handwritten note promising to pay approximately £6000 to Madame Alabiso of S.E.F.I. Cinematografica.⁹ This sum would be around £40,000 (\$56,000) in today's money. (Italian producer

Mario Alabiso was present at the first meeting between Franco and Erwin Dietrich in late April/early May 1975; presumably one of the projects discussed was S.E.F.I.'s future production of *Mandinga*. The person to whom Franco owed money in the wake of *Mandinga* was evidently Mario's wife, whom one assumes was the executive in charge of the company.)

In essence what seems to have happened is that Dietrich extricated Franco from his legal liability to complete *Mandinga*, and Franco himself paid a sizeable sum of money to the producers to compensate them. Why was this necessary, when the film had apparently been completed? Perhaps after scrutiny of the negative, the Alabisos regarded it as unreleasable? This was, after all, a time when Franco was dashing off films with such a cavalier attitude to technical merit that Dietrich had initially considered shelving *Frauengefängnis*. Maybe *Mandinga* was beyond 'rough and ready', maybe it was genuinely appalling: out of focus, incoherent, too dark, or too over-exposed, or simply not the script that had been promised. Eventually, in September 1976, S.E.F.I. Cinematografica mounted a second production of *Mandinga*, directed by obscure Spaghetti Western helmer Mario Pinzauti. None of the actors involved were carried over from the Franco production, and the central location of Franco's version, Montpellier's Castle Mogère, was nowhere to be seen. As far as one can tell, none of the Franco footage was incorporated. Interestingly, the credits declare "Insurance by Compagnia Europea di Previdenza". While insurance deals are often vital in film production, it's unusual to see them turning up on the credits of an Italian exploitation film; perhaps S.E.F.I. had a lot of difficulty financing the remount after Franco's decampment, and this prominent credit was part of the deal? If so it suggests just how close Franco came to being unemployable. Certainly it suggests that the real reason Franco couldn't shoot in Italy any more was not because he'd grown sick of his Italian producer but because they had grown sick of him. In the hot-house context of Rome film production, all it would have taken to blot Franco's reputation was a tiny bit of gossip from one producer to another...

Sadly, Franco's *Mandinga* seems to have ended its days mouldering away in the Technicolor labs in Rome. Perhaps it's still there today. But while we can't see the film, we can, thanks to Roman Güttinger and Uwe Huber, take a peek into the contents of the mysterious suitcase that Dietrich retrieved from the Hotel Le Quetzal. Here's a partial list of the contents, including Jess Franco's notes, script outlines, and plans for future films circa January 1976:

1. "Blue Medea". A hand-written synopsis by Jess Franco.
2. "Dunia, la novia eterna". A typewritten story adaptation. "Based on Puchkine's book *The Postmaster*, adapted by David Khunne and Jess Franco." This refers to Alexander Pushkin's "The Postmaster", a short story from his collection *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* (1831). The original tells of a poor Russian station master (innkeeper) whose orderly life is thrown into chaos when his beloved daughter Dunya is kidnapped by a handsome hussar. He discovers her

whereabouts and tries to see her, but is thrown out without making contact. Upon learning that she now lives a high society existence and does not wish to leave, he goes back to his station, a broken man.

3. "Mais qui donc a violé Linda" (4 typewritten pages). The title page is headed: "*Mais qui donc a violé Linda (Morbosité). Tiré de la nouvelle Cette femme perverse... [This Perverse Woman...] de David Khunne*".
4. "Yacula" (10 pages handwritten by Jess Franco). This is Franco's original story outline for the film that became *La comtesse noire* aka *Female Vampire*.
5. "Lorna l'exorciste" (9 typewritten pages).
6. "Minuit Party-Porno Pop" and "Shining Sex" (4 handwritten pages, not in Franco's hand). Cast and character names, crew, plot, shooting times.
7. "Concert en sex majeur/ Ejaculation" (5 typewritten pages) – a film by J.J. Johnson, based on a story by Jess and Nicole Franco. "A French/Belgian co-production. Executive producer and director: J. Franco (James P. Jhonson [sic])". Commencement of shooting: 4 August 1975. Delivery of completed film: October 1975. Locations: Haute Provence and Paris. Cast: Lina Romay (Irina von Karstein), William Berger (Karl Tanner), Maria Montez (Moirra), Raymond Hardy [Ramón Ardid] (The Hunter). Presale to Italy locked: 10,000 US dollars. Typed on notepaper from the Hotel Caprice, Rome. Note the suggested location of Haute-Provence aka Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, which is fairly close to Nice and Antibes where shooting took place in the summer of 1975 for *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Downtown* and *Die Sklavinnen*.
8. "Melody en sex majeur/ Sexyrella" (8 handwritten pages)
9. "Juliette De Sade" (13 handwritten pages, including budget calculations). This adaptation of the Marquis De Sade's *Justine* is a modern-day remount of sequences Franco had already filmed in 1968 for his Sadean period drama *Justine*.
10. "La porte du brouillard" ["The Door of the Mist"] A complete screenplay by Alain Petit, after a character created by J. Franco – with characters (including 'Irina von Karnstein'). "*The presence story [sic] is dedicated to J. Franco, to his Black Countess...*"
11. "Las hermanas de la cruz" ["The Sisters of the Cross"] Complete handwritten story treatment by Jess Franco.
12. "Los desperados" (13 typewritten pages and 5 pages of handwritten notes).
13. "Pace a mezzanotte" (script by Gaetono Dell'Era). Translates as 'Peace at Midnight'.
14. "Dracula Junior" – A story outline for a multi-monster horror comedy, featuring Dracula, Frankenstein and his Monster, the Werewolf, the Phantom of the Opera, Quasimodo and the Invisible Man.
15. "Tarzana". 10 handwritten pages, by Jess Franco.
16. Hand-drawn poster mock-ups for three 'imaginary' films: "Dynamite South", "Lascive" and "Ectasse Island".

L'ASSASSIN PORTAIT DES BAS NOIRS

The Killer Wore Black Stockings

UNFINISHED

Italy, 1975

Alternative titles

L'assassino portava calze nere (proposed Italian release title)

shooting date November 1975

Cast: Lina Romay. Denis Torre. Beni Cardoso. Ramón Ardid.

Production notes: In parallel with the shooting of *Mandinga*, Franco also began a secret 'back-pocket' production called "The Assassin Wore Black Stockings". Correspondence from the Elite Film archives first mentions the film in relation to a deal being done between Franco and Anna Crognale Hansen of B.O.S. Co. (Rome). A letter from Hansen to Erwin Dietrich, dated 22 October 1975, says, "We have spoken with Mr. Franco Manera who assured us that the two pictures of which we have 50% of the foreign sales, i.e. *Women Behind Bars* (Cella di punizione) and *The Assassin Wore Black Stockings* (L'assassino portava calze nere), have nothing to do with the four pictures you mentioned in your letter [i.e. Dietrich's own Franco productions]. They will have French nationality and the official producing company will be Eurociné of Paris."¹

The assumption has long been that *L'assassin portait des bas noirs* amounted to just a few minutes of footage. However, correspondence from the Elite Film archives, between Franco and the Telecolor laboratories in Rome, suggests otherwise. On 13 August 1976, Franco wrote to Enrico Colombo at Telecolor: "My dear friend, as you well know (look at our agreements, and also, if you like, my contracts with Mrs. Hanssen), the films 'Punition Cell' and 'L'assassin portait des bas noirs' have been largely funded by Elite Film. Now they want to start work immediately on these movies in their territories (Switzerland, Germany, Austria), that is to say the first of the films. I convinced the gentlemen at Elite Film to make copies at your place, despite their bad experiences with other Italian laboratories. I beg you not to make difficulties because as you know, they are perfectly entitled and they will order about 20 copies so you know how serious they are. Then they will do the same with the other movie."²

'Mrs. Hanssen' in this context is clearly Anna Crognale Hansen of B.O.S. Co. The first thing to note here is the open admission, by Franco, that *Women Behind Bars* was funded by Elite! As part of his mission to gain legal control of the clandestinely shot *Women Behind Bars*, Dietrich must have asked Franco to persuade Telecolor to give him access to the negative, and in the course of this correspondence Franco also tries to draw *L'assassin portait des bas noirs* back into play. By referring to the latter as "the other movie" and suggesting that if Telecolor play ball on *Women Behind Bars* a similarly lucrative order for the second film will follow, Franco appears to be suggesting that what's at stake is a finished

film, suitable for the striking of release prints. So was he bluffing, baiting the hook in the hope that Telecolor would allow access to *Women Behind Bars*? Or was *L'assassin portait des bas noirs* genuinely a finished film?

Not a lot is known about the storyline, although according to Alain Petit's *Manacoa Files*, production manager and actor Denis Torre remembers shooting scenes on rooftops and in hotel rooms, appearing as a killer hiding under a bed, and being present at the death of a character played by Beni Cardoso. The genre appears to have been a kind of giallo or krimi: from the title it certainly sounds as though Franco was aiming for the same market as *L'assassino ha riservato nove poltrone* aka *The Killer Reserved Nine Seats* (Giuseppe Bennati, 1974), *L'Assassino è costretto ad uccidere ancora* aka *The Killer Must Kill Again* (Luigi Cozzi, 1975) and *Il vizio ha le calze nere* aka *Vice Has Black Stockings* (Tano Cimarosa, 1975). Franco tried to shoot a new version of the story in 1984 (see *El asesino llevaba medias negras*) but it never saw the light of day either.

GIRLS IN THE NIGHT TRAFFIC

(DVD cover title)

Switzerland, 1976

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Mädchen im Nachtverkehr (SWI) *Girls in the Night Traffic*

Alternative titles

Wilde Lust (WG theatrical – hardcore version) *Wild Lust*

Heißer Sex im Nachtverkehr (WG softcore theatrical version)

Hot Sex in the Night Traffic

Le porno VIP (IT theatrical)

Production company

Cinemec-Produktion (Berlin)

Theatrical distributor

Ascot Verleih (West Germany)

World Sales

Elite Film (Zürich)

Timeline

Shooting on sets in Zürich	8–20 March	1976
Germany (as <i>Mädchen im Nachtverkehr</i>)	30 July	1976
Zürich (as <i>Mädchen im Nachtverkehr</i>)	November	1976
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	11 December	1978
Naples	06 June	1980
Rome	26 April	1985

Theatrical running time

Germany (as *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr*) 60m42s

Video/DVD/Blu-ray running times (converted where necessary)

Ascot-Elite Blu-ray (as *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr*) 71m32s

German VHS (as *Wilde Lust*) 96m53s

director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. A Cinemec Production for **Ascot Distribution**. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. editor: **Peter Baumgartner**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. in Eastmancolor.

Cast: **Esther Moser** (Marti aka 'Girlie'). **Kali Hansa** (Margit). **Pilar Coll** [aka Pillar Coll] (Pia). **Eric Falk** (Mustapha). **Diatta Fatou** [aka Diotta Fatou] (dancer in silver boots). **Sigad Sharaf** (dancer at Turkish brothel). **Roman Huber** (Pia's client with striped tie). **Kurt Meinicke** (photographer and sex trafficker). **Marlies Haas** (Isabel, the female sex trafficker). **Paul Nussbaumer** (Mr. Hacketal, client who wants to make out with Kali Hansa at Turkish brothel). *From German press sheet:* **Yvonne Eduser**. **L. Henriques**. **Adriano Veronesi**. **Mike Lederer**.

Notes: 1) There are no onscreen credits for either version of the film. 2) Although the German press sheet gives character names for Marlies Haas ('Isabel') and Paul Nussbaumer ('Mr. Hacketal'), these do not appear in the English subtitles, nor (as far as I can tell) are they used in the German dialogue. 3) Mike Lederer (the coach driver in Franco's *Jack the Ripper*) is credited in the Swiss pressbook for *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr*, but does not appear in any currently available version of the film. 4) The character name 'Claude' which appears in the English-language subtitles for Pilar Coll's character is incorrect – Coll's character is called 'Pia'. Similarly 'Margaret' in the subtitles should really be 'Margit' and 'Martine' is really 'Marti'. 5) 'Sigad Sharaf' is not a real Arabic name. 6) The Italian poster (*Le porno VIP*) credits L. Henriques as 'L. Enriquez'.

Synopsis: *Three beautiful hookers who share an apartment recount their experiences with a variety of clients. Marti (aka 'Girlie') describes her encounter with a handsome Turkish stud called Mustapha; Pia recalls a client who wanted her to act the part of his daughter while he jerks off watching her play with herself; and Margit trumps the others with a story of a man who insisted on making love to her inside a coffin. The girls perform a sex show at a nightclub, a place many of their clients frequent. Marti accepts an offer of a photo-session from a filmmaker and his girlfriend. The next day she phones her friends to say she's been taken off for an around the world promotional shoot. After a while, Pia and Margit become suspicious. Margit meets up with the 'filmmaker' at his apartment – she is chloroformed unconscious and sold to white slavers. After Margit disappears, a melancholy Pia is left on her own. Deciding to investigate, she falls into the same trap, and eventually all three girls find themselves in Turkey, working at the same brothel. Their pimp is none other than their one-time client, Mustapha...*

Production notes: A light-hearted quickie of very little substance, clearly dashed off in a week or so, *Girls in the Night Traffic* aka *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr* is notable for being the first Franco film made entirely on studio sets, with no location shooting at all. When you consider how important location is to Franco's cinematic vision, being studio-bound must have chafed him terribly. He generally sought greater and greater freedom in his career: yet here he was, in early 1976, working under what amounts to creative house arrest. So why did he tolerate it?

The answer lies in Franco's alleged misuse of Dietrich's money (see *Women Behind Bars*), his illicit sales of the foreign rights to Dietrich productions (see *Barbed Wire Dolls*), and most of all, the world of trouble in which he found himself following production of *Mandinga*. It's clear that limiting Franco to studio-bound production was Dietrich's way of keeping the director busy on the strictest of leashes, while getting him to work off his debts. Three consecutive Franco 'quickies' – *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr*, *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* and *In 80 Betten um die Welt* – were shot in this way in just a few weeks, with casts made up almost entirely of Dietrich regulars (only Kali Hansa is carried over from previous Franco productions). Jess would not be sent out on location again until June 1976, and even then it was to shoot *Jack the Ripper* in and around Zürich, where Dietrich could closely monitor his progress. After that, Franco would spend two more years under the yoke of the Dietrich production house, with Peter Baumgartner and Rudolf Küttel in charge of the camera. No more shooting two films at the same time and then selling the second film to another company: every bit of footage that Franco shot for Elite/Ascot Films in 1976 and 1977 ended up in the appropriate Dietrich production.

When Dietrich sat down to examine the problem, he discovered that Franco's debts had been piling up for at least two years beforehand. A document compiled by Dietrich, made available to me by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter, lists the various businesses and individuals to whom Franco owed sizeable sums of money:

SFr. 12,000 [approx £2500] private debt.

SFr. 13,000 [approx £2650] in French taxes.

SFr. 16,000 [approx £3250] to the Hotel Montiboli.

SFr. 14,000 [approx £2850] to the Hotel Quetzal.

FFr. 6,000 [approx £1950] to Ronald Weiss, Martine Stedil, Denis Torre and Michèle Goudigen.

May 2018 equivalents, according to *UK Inflation Calculator*:

£16,900 private debt.

£17,950 in French taxes.

£22,000 to the Hotel Montiboli.

£19,300 to the Hotel Quetzal.

£13,200 to Weiss, Stedil, Torre and Goudigen.

Total: £89,350

Luckily for Franco, Dietrich possessed both an orderly mind and the necessary funds to handle the situation. He worked out a deal with the *Mandinga* producers and settled Franco's remaining debts, including a massive bill he'd run up at the Hotel Montiboli in Villajoyosa, Spain, which must have dated back to production of *Kiss Me Killer* and *The Hot Nights of Linda* in December 1973! If word had got around that Franco was financially irresponsible it could have led to bad publicity and even blacklisting. Such an outcome would have severely limited his future options. From Dietrich's point of view, if he sorted out Franco's debts he could keep a tight rein on him as Elite's 'house director', safe in the knowledge that Franco was now beholden to him for settling his liabilities. We can at last understand why Franco agreed to work under such tight restraints during 1976-77, and we also have a plausible psychological explanation for the marked increase in themes of coercion and imprisonment in his work during this period!

Another striking feature of *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr*, *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* and *In 80 Betten um die Welt* is the absence of Lina Romay. Just a couple of months earlier, Franco and Romay had essentially eloped together from the Hotel Quetzal in the South of France, leaving Romay's husband Ramón Ardid high and dry. For the remainder of Franco's Swiss sojourn, however, Romay's appearances in his films were greatly reduced. Perhaps she took time off from filmmaking to try and repair her marriage? Her absence was certainly unusual: she had been in all twenty-five of Franco's films between *Los ojos del doctor Orloff* (1973) and *Die Marquise von Sade* (1975). Suddenly, in the wake of the *Mandinga* controversy, she skipped *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr*, *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* and *In 80 Betten um die Welt*, and took only a small role in *Jack the Ripper*. She returned to the fold for *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, playing the second female lead, but then disappeared for another five films, from *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* to *Love Camp* (her longest run of absence from the Franco filmography), before turning up again as the abused heroine in *Wicked Women* (1977). Notably, this last film marked the end of her marriage to Ramón Ardid: her divorce papers came through just prior to shooting it, in September 1977.

Review: If you're in a *very* facetious mood, you could say that *Girls in the Night Traffic* is Franco's version of *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962) with its concentration on the minutiae of prostitutes' experiences. The film is built around three girls, Pia (Coll), Margit (Hansa) and Marti (Moser), whose relationship is endangered by the darker aspects of their chosen profession. As in the Godard film, financial circumstances are frequently foregrounded, and the emotional and moral pretences of sex for hire are lampooned: for instance, when Marti receives Mustapha (Eric Falk) into her room, he asks in broken English, "if it not cost too much, I want to make love." Marti responds, "Not just sticking it in? You mean a really big act? Just a minute – first the dough, then the big act!" Social status and the immigrant experience are also alluded to: "Even if you're a foreign worker, you're still a man to me," says Marti to him. The film is also

clearly a feather-light borrowing from the early stages of De Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*, with its emphasis on amoral prostitutes reminiscing about male perversions and peccadilloes. One scene involves a father who wants to jack off watching a woman pretend to be his daughter (although the less than accommodating hooker refuses to play along verbally); another scene features a man who insists on making it with Margit in a coffin bedecked with flowers. This is lifted directly from De Sade, one of the few perversions in *The 120 Days of Sodom* that wouldn't have got the film banned outright.

But while De Sade's Madame Degrange and her cohorts are indulgent and expansive on the topic of male excess, these girls are sardonic, sarcastic even. They run the gamut from lusty recollection to ironic detachment, sometimes in the space of a single utterance. The film coasts along on a wave of 'girl talk', which surely must have been improvised because to script it would take a hundred pages! Much of the banter is at the expense of the male clients, as the girls mock the male inability to sustain multiple orgasms ("You try and milk an ox!" and "The lake is calm!"). Margit pronounces that all women are potentially a little bit lesbian, because men can't satisfy them for long enough. As the film meanders along through loosely connected sex scenes, we learn more about the three friends: in flashback, it transpires that Pia was a saxophonist in a big band, Margit was a cat burglar, and Marti was an artist's girlfriend and 'muse'. Pia met Margit when the latter tried to rob her apartment – after giving her a bump on the head for her troubles, Pia forgave her and the two became firm friends. She then met Marti after taking a job as an artist's model – Marti seduced her while claiming that she and the artist were having a 'father-daughter' relationship. However, the roles are casually subverted when Marti suggests Pia should make it with the artist too, telling her, "He's such a dear little boy – he dreams of a girl blowing his pipe!" (The uncredited actor playing the 'dear little boy' is actually the most well-endowed of the male participants, and has no problem maintaining an erection; something of a rarity in a Franco sex film.)

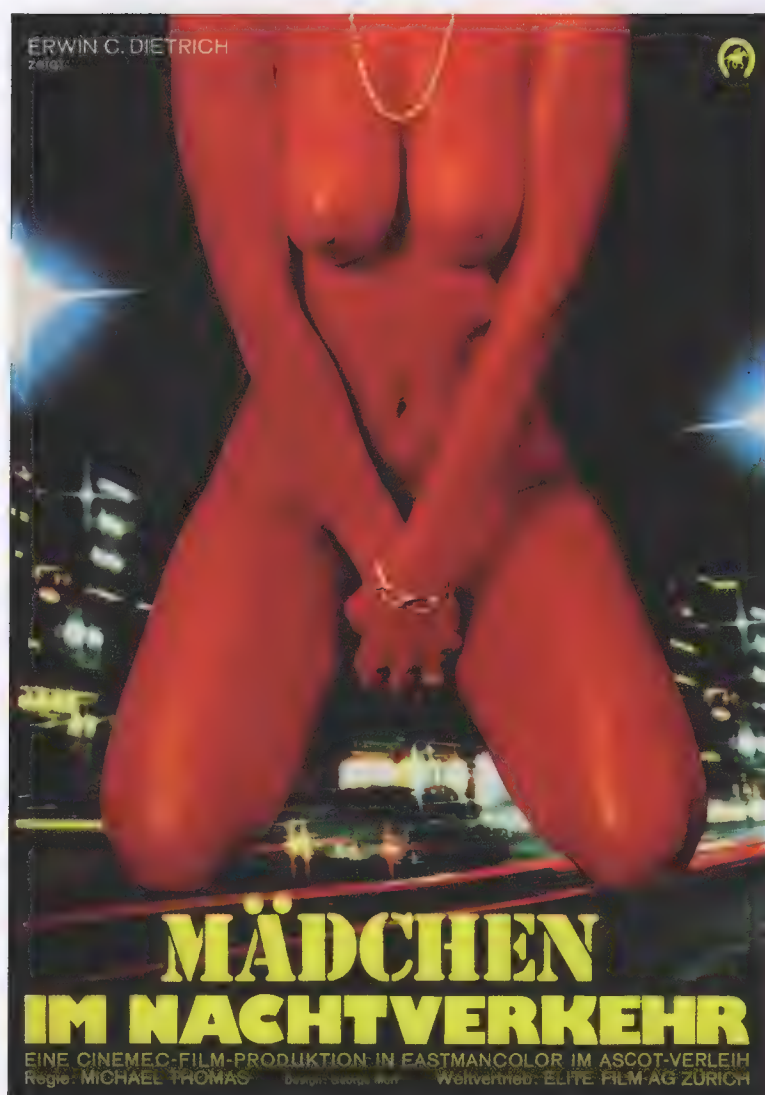
For the first two-thirds of *Girls in the Night Traffic* it is something of a fairytale world these women inhabit, with their spotless apartment and framed movie posters on the walls. There's a self-sufficient communal vibe to their lifestyle – they're free from rancour, division, drug addiction or sexually transmitted diseases, and there's not a pimp in sight. Depicting the real lives of prostitutes circa 1976 falls a long way down the list of priorities; instead there are ridiculous scenes such as one in which Moser, Coll and Hansa eat fruit together 'erotically', which I somehow doubt is the way hookers spend their down-time. "Honestly, we never get bored" says Hansa while fellating a banana, blatantly mocking the absurdity of the situation in what I like to think was a sarcastic ad-lib. Gradually, however, as first one girl then another is abducted by a shady photographer, who drugs them and sells them into white slavery, a shadow falls over the film's frolicking shag-pile silliness. When Margit goes looking for Marti (the first girl to be abducted), she ends up with the sinister photographer (and his



**MÄDCHEN IM
NACHTVERKEHR**



**MÄDCHEN IM
NACHTVERKEHR**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
 German poster crediting the film to 'Michael Thomas', a pseudonym more commonly used by producer Erwin Dietrich for his own directorial work.
 Marti (Esther Moser) with her Turkish client Mustapha (Eric Falk).
 Abducted and forced to work in a Turkish brothel, previously happy hookers Marti and Margit are sized up by their new 'clients' (including Paul Nussbaumer, right).
 Margit (Kali Hansa) entertains a perverse client in this scene redolent of some of the more 'curious' passions of De Sade.

equally dodgy girlfriend) at the same apartment where her friend was kidnapped. The dialogue here is exactly the same as it was when Marti met the couple (observations about champagne going cold, etc.), suggesting that this scenario of drugging and abduction has been played out so often that it's got its own script, which in an understated way is genuinely disturbing. But by the time all three girls have been abducted, and find themselves working at the same Turkish brothel, the humorous elements rise up again, with absurd customers such as one Dietrich regular, a fez perched on his head, yelling "*Mohammed in Valhalla! Mohammed in Valhalla!*" as he bangs a bored but resigned Margit. Mustapha is back too, suggesting that he's in on the white slavery ring. Falk's last scene, in which he shoots a copious splash of sperm (fake of course) across a portrait of a Bedouin Arab, seems poised to reveal more about the character he's playing, but instead it turns out to have been a 'throwaway shot' of no real significance...

Notable mainly for being a hardcore title amid a slew of softcore projects (at least in its unexpurgated version *Wilde Lust*) *Girls in the Night Traffic* is a genial waste of ninety minutes – not without charm, but definitely one of Franco's less thrilling efforts. Much of the appeal comes directly from the girls, who exude a warm and sensual self-confidence; as a piece of filmmaking, however, one has to say it's an underachiever. Quite mellow for a Franco sex film, it lacks the frisson of strangeness or sleaze that enlivens so many of the other Dietrich productions, so if you're looking for nastiness or some sort of illicit thrill, be warned; this is a lazy luke-warm experience suitable for completists only.

Cast and crew: Star of the show is the exuberant and playful Kali Hansa, already a familiar face in Franco's work thanks to appearances in *Les Ébrablées*, *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*, *Un silencio de tumba*, *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*, *Countess Perverse*, *The Lustful Amazon* and *Les Gloutonnes*. Hansa was a model from Cuba whom Franco met in 1972 when she was dating Argentinean actor Alberto Dalbés, who appeared in a slew of Franco films between 1970-1974. According to Franco, Hansa eventually gave up her film career (and her dalliance with Dalbés) to return to Cuba and engage directly in political resistance to Fidel Castro!

Music: "*I may be wrong, but I think you're wonderful*" sings the chanteuse in the title song, the only coherent line in a lyric clearly written with only a tenuous acquaintance with English. The rest of the film is a ragbag of music cues drawn from the Dietrich-Baumgartner stockpile. Note the sitar player in the Turkish brothel scenes: although his finger positions don't synchronise with the soundtrack, he looks as if he knows what he's doing on the instrument. Could this be the man who provides the distinctive sitar-twanging theme which turns up in many of Franco's Dietrich-era films (chiefly *Satanic Sisters* and *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray*)? It's unlikely that *two* sitar players would have found work in the Zürich film industry!

Locations: As noted, there is no outdoor location shooting in this film; not even an establishing shot. The Turkish brothel at the end

of the film appears to have been an actual bar, no doubt in Zürich. **Other versions:** The hardcore version, *Wilde Lust*, runs for 93m, while the softcore *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr* clocks in at just over 69m. The extra material goes all the way. Penetration and erections are visible throughout, along with a certain amount of deep manual stimulation of vaginas. A 'stunt cock' contributes the penetration shots for Eric Falk in the first scene, but Falk himself performs in the finale, climax and all. There's one slightly odd difference between the hard and soft versions: in the former, Moser's sexual encounter with the kidnappers is divided into two halves, as if she's visited them for sex on two separate occasions; in the latter, the footage is combined into one scene, so the softcore cut actually makes more narrative sense.

WEISSE HAUT AUF SCHWARZEN SCHENKELN

Switzerland, 1976

Alternative titles

Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel (German censor-approved title) *White skin and black thighs*

Des mains blanches sur la peau noir (title on contract signed by Franco and Dietrich) *White Hands on Black Skin*

Production company

Elite Film (Berlin)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (West Germany)

Timeline

Shooting on sets in Zürich	8-13 March	1976
W. Germany/Switz (hardcore version)*	29 July	1976
German X-cert JK442 issued	25 May	1977
Germany	14 June	1977

* Longer version shown uncensored in porn cinemas.

Theatrical running times

Germany (softcore version)	73m43s
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Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite softcore version	74m07s
Ascot-Elite hardcore version	79m30s

director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. editor: **Peter Baumgartner**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. an **Elite-Film** production released by **Ascot-Verleih**. world sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich).

Cast: **Pilar Coll** (Lola Kühn). **Roman Huber** (Robert Kühn, Lola's husband). **Diotta Fatou** (Marga, a prostitute). **Sigad Sharaf** [aka 'Sigart Sharaf'] (Aunt Bijou, a call-girl madame). **Kali Hansa** (Lena, a stripper). **Eric Falk** (Victor). **Kurt Meinicke** (man wearing bow-tie watching Marga's strip routine). **Marlies Haas** (female partner of man wearing bow-tie). *Swiss press book adds:* Esther Moser. Yvonne Gugolz. Uschi Karnat.

Notes: 1) There are no credits on the film itself. 2) Stills for this film feature actors who do not appear in either version currently available. One shows Franco himself enjoying an intimate encounter with Diotta Fatou, in a scene missing from both the hard and soft versions. 3) Esther Moser is credited in the Swiss pressbook (and on IMDb as 'Emmie Schulze, 1st Girl with Victor'), but she does not appear in either version currently available.

Synopsis: Robert Kühn attends a live sex show and watches the erotic dancers before accepting an invitation from one of the girls, Marga, to go to her apartment for sex. After they screw, Robert falls asleep, upon which Marga attempts suicide by jumping out of her bedroom window. The police believe that Robert was responsible for throwing her out, and arrest him: meanwhile Marga lies in hospital, barely alive. Robert's wife Lola investigates on his behalf and questions another of the girls at the sex club – Lena, Marga's lesbian lover. Lola tells Lena that she's sure Robert is innocent. Lena refuses to divulge anything unless Lola makes love with her. They have sex in Lena's apartment, after which they sleep. During the night, Lola has an erotic dream about making love with her imprisoned husband in his cell, and another dream in which she writhes around on a floor strewn with naked men. The next day she makes love with Lena again, and Lena shares the contents of Marga's diary with her. One entry describes the death of Marga's prostitute mother, which we see in flashback: she had caught her boyfriend stealing money from her handbag and attacked him with a knife; in the ensuing struggle she was killed. The diary reveals that Marga, who was fourteen when her mother died, swore to get even with all men, using sex to ensnare them, and then fleeing them in revenge for her mother's death. Setting up in business with her Aunt Bijou, a call-girl madame, Marga became a prostitute. Prominent among her clients was a rich aristocrat, the Duke Anastasia, who paid Marga a fortune to whip him and dominate him. When the Duke's wife found out, she shot him, but this proved lucky for Marga as the Duke left her a lot of money in his will. Marga's next conquest was Victor, a handsome sportsman and psychology graduate. She catches Victor making out with Bijou, whom she has grown to dislike. Angry, she uses the infraction to dominate Victor and bend him to her will. Nevertheless, Marga finds she cannot control Victor, who is seduced by Lena. Lena and Victor screw onstage at the club. Watching them, Marga believes they are in love, which is why she has tried to commit suicide: the man upon whom she tried to pin responsibility, Robert Kühn, was simply a random victim in Marga's crusade against all men. Lena didn't realise that Marga was so possessive, or that she would mistake her onstage sex act for real love. At Marga's bedside, Lena pledges her fidelity to Marga, who is recovering from her injuries.

Production notes: Filmed pretty much simultaneously with *Girls in the Night Traffic* (props and actors are shared between the two productions), this is the second of three hardcore quickies shot entirely on indoor sets, upstairs at the Restaurant Gasthof Neuhaus in Zürich (see pictures opposite). In the film, the lead character Marga's diary entries are dated March 1976, which is an additional indication that the shoot took place that month. The correct title for the film is *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* (White Skin on Black Thighs) although German posters bear the subtle variant *Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel* (White Skin and Black Thighs). While the original was used for the version that played exclusively in porn theatres, when the film was submitted to the German film board (FSK) they did not approve the title and insisted it be changed. Realising that the problem lay in the suggestion of racial dominance (white on black) Dietrich changed the title to a less charged version (white and black). Since the FSK still weren't happy, he also added the tagline "White and Black Go Hand in Hand" which finally salved the anxieties of the censor board. (Thanks To Guiskard Oberparleiter for this interesting information.) The censor report for the film indicates that the director is 'Dave Tough', a Franco pseudonym that had previously been used on *Julietta 69*. (Note that the title *Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel* was recycled from the French *Des mains blanches sur la peau noir*, which was the name under which *Die Sklavinnen* started life, in the summer of 1975.)

For years this film was impossible to see, having never been released on video anywhere in the world. Thanks to the press-sheet and poster, which gave the director as 'Michael Thomas' or 'M. Thomas' (Erwin Dietrich's directorial pseudonym) it was presumed to be one of Dietrich's own films as director. However, when asked about the film in August 2001, Franco said, "I directed it, not Dietrich. Dietrich didn't want to direct it, he didn't like to direct. He asked me to replace him".¹ After Franco's death, the film was released on DVD by Dietrich as part of the "Jess Franco Golden Goya Collection", with a back cover proclaiming: "One of the rarest films by enfant terrible director Jess Franco – to be seen again for the first time since its theatrical release in 1977!"

Review: If *Girls in the Night Traffic* is feather-light, *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* is its even less substantial shadow. Another studio-bound production, sharing many of the same props and pretty much the same cast, it lacks both the structural focus and the warmth of friendship that made *Girls in the Night Traffic* so genially amusing. Instead, *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* is haunted by a film it cannot remotely equal: Franco's 1972 classic *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*, from which it borrows a basic plot structure without adding anything interesting or engaging. *Sinner* was the heartbreaking story of a young girl, traumatised by sexual abuse, whose subsequent erotic experiences fail to alleviate her terrible loneliness. Here, instead of rape being the trigger for the lead character's actions, we're asked to sympathise with Marga, a woman wreaking vengeance on mankind because her



ABOVE LEFT: This outdoor scene featuring Diotta Fatou, included in the German stills set, is strangely missing from all currently available versions of the film. ABOVE RIGHT: Diotta Fatou and Jess Franco, the latter presumably playing a client of Marga's, in another scene missing from both softcore and hardcore versions. LEFT: Lena (Kali Hansa) and Marga (Diotta Fatou) perform onstage amid dry ice and psychedelic lights in *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*. BELOW LEFT & RIGHT: Upstairs at the Restaurant Gasthof Neuhaus in Zürich was the studio space where so many Dietrich films were created, including *Girls in the Night Traffic* and *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*. The steps and railings at the front of the building can be seen in Franco's *Blue Rita* (1977).



prostitute mother died in a tussle while trying to stab a thieving boyfriend. This could conceivably have worked, if only mother and daughter shared a single scene in the film! We see the knife incident dramatised in flashback when Lena reads from Marga's diary, but this shows that Marga wasn't present at the killing. It all feels too detached: we're hearing about it (and seeing it) at several removes: Lena reads from Marga's diary in which she reminisces about her mother, but as she didn't see what actually happened, this visual representation is Lena's imagining of Marga's imagining of Marga's mother's experience, a double remove which lacks emotional punch. Similarly, when Marga announces in her diary that she has decided to take her own life, and frame a man – any man – for her death, it's difficult to feel much sympathy for such an indiscriminate action. In *Sinner*, the same man who molested the heroine in her teens unwittingly pays for her services when she's a prostitute later in life, leading to a revenge which is targeted and coherent. In comparison, Marga's crusade against men is too random and difficult to justify. Her character is further soured by jealousy. She's furious when Victor has an affair, but reserves her right to a lesbian affair with Lena. Hypocritical, two-faced, consumed by a notion of vengeance which lacks moral focus, she's one of Franco's few really uninteresting leading female characters.

Meanwhile, Marga's status as a black woman only superficially affects the story. The one time it's mentioned, outside of minor sex talk, is when Lola chastises her husband for picking up hookers: "How could you associate with such a cheap whore – and a black one at that!" Again, the dramatic precursor is *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*, specifically the character of Mrs. Ortey in that film, played by Jacqueline Laurent. Here, however, Franco adds a dislikeable twist: the equivalent character Lola Kühn (Pilar Coll) is not just a bourgeois middle-class housewife outraged that her husband sleeps with whores: she's a racist too. What's curious is that Lola then goes on to play a featured role in the proceedings, without her racism being addressed again. Whereas Mrs. Ortey in *Sinner* has her class snobbery critiqued and her consciousness raised, Mrs. Kühn goes through no such transformation. For all we know, at the end of the story she still feels the same way about blacks; Franco doesn't afford us any glimpse of her thought processes, and when the narrative dribbles to a halt with a bedside promise of devotion from Lena to Marga, Mrs. Kühn remains a bystander. She may have changed her mind about 'cheap whores', having enjoyed a lesbian romp with Lena, but she utters not a word about Marga. It's all very thin gruel. Many a Franco film began life as a note scribbled on the back of an envelope during a restaurant dinner; few appear to have undergone so little in the way of subsequent development.

Cast and crew: Diotta Fatou also appears in Franco's *Die Sklavinnen*. Although her material in that film was definitely shot during the studio schedule for *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* (everything matches, including costumes, lighting and extras) Fatou's specific dance gyrations are different, suggesting that when skimming through his stock of material looking for inserts for *Die*

Sklavinnen, Franco drew upon longer takes that were not used in the finished version of *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*.

Music: The usual selection of cues from Walter Baumgartner.

Connections: As already noted, the basic plot is copied from *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. A prostitute inexplicably commits suicide after picking up a john, thus framing him for murder. The man's wife investigates to clear her husband's name. The two films even share an actor, Kali Hansa, who appears in both as a stripper working at the same club as the dead girl ... Xaviera Hollander (a former call girl and madam whose best-selling memoir *The Happy Hooker: My Own Story* was published in 1971) and Madame Claude (aka Fernande Grudet, the high-class Parisian brothel keeper of the 1960s) are referenced as writers of erotic memoirs ... The scene in which Kali Hansa dances nude at the strip club watched by Pilar Coll also appears in Erwin C. Dietrich's *Adam & Eva – Mädchen, die es gerne mächen* (1976). The fact that *Adam & Eva* includes the Franco film's voice-over (referring to Hansa's character as 'Lena') means that the material was definitely shot for *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* and then simply imported into the far more episodic Dietrich film.

Other versions: Although there are currently only two versions available on DVD or Blu-ray (an improvement on none, which was the case until 2014!), there is clearly a third cut of the film out there somewhere. Stills show not only Jess Franco himself in an intimate clinch with Marga but also a man in army fatigues who does not appear in the Ascot-Elite Blu-ray release at all... The film is not to be confused with Dietrich's much earlier *Weisse Haut auf schwarzem Markt* (1969).

IN 80 BETTEN UM DIE WELT

Switzerland, 1976

Original theatrical title in country of origin

In 80 Betten um die Welt *Around the World in 80 Beds*

Alternative titles

Mondo Erotico In 80 Betten um die Welt (Blu-ray cover title)

Production company

Elite Film (Berlin)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (West Germany)

Timeline

Shooting on sets in Zürich	22-27 March	1976
shooting in Amsterdam	June	1976
Germany	02 June	1977

Theatrical running time
Germany ('X' certificate) 78m39s

Blu-ray running time
Ascot-Elite 86m58s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. editor: **Peter Baumgartner**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. an **Elite Film** production released by **Ascot-Verleih**. world sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich).

Cast: **Esther Moser** ('Midnight Porno' TV-show host). **Vera Chollet** (Sunella Parker, millionairess and sex tourist). **Roman Huber** (bespectacled New Yorker watching black mass/Mr. Schlamp, man in Copenhagen sex show/Roemer, Amsterdam masturbation student [three roles]). **Jess Franco** (man in black leather jacket watching black mass). **Sigad Sharaf** [aka 'Sigart Sharaf'] (Sally, black hooker/dancer at Turkish nightclub [two roles]). **Eric Falk** (Hamburg man whipped and ridden like a horse/man who deflowers virgin at Agoan wedding ceremony/man in leather jacket at Turkish club [three roles]). **Esther Studer** (sacrificial victim in New York black mass/virgin wife in Agoa marriage ritual/Ms. Ellis, female masturbation student in Amsterdam [three roles]). **Mike Lederer** (Black Mass Priest/Copenhagen sex show host/garlanded man preparing bridegroom in Agoa sex ritual/gay Amsterdam masturbation student [four roles]). **Pilar Coll** (Turkish dancer). **Lorli Bucher** (trouser-groping observer at black mass/Mrs. Schlamp, older woman in Copenhagen sex show/Hamburg dominatrix/Angoan bride's handmaiden [four roles]). **Karl Gysling** (fat goateed man in yellow shirt watching the Schlamps' performance). **Paul Nussbaumer** (naked man watching black mass with Sunella/man in sleeveless t-shirt watching Copenhagen sex show/Mr. Fassbinding, Amsterdam masturbation student who fucks blow-up doll/man in suit and tie watching sitar player in Turkish club [four roles]).

Synopsis: *Welcome to Midnight Porno, a cable TV sex station that takes over the airwaves at night. We are greeted by their link-woman, and taken for a tour around the sex-spots of the world... In New York, we see a black mass conducted in the basement of a strip joint in Greenwich Village. A virgin is sacrificed to Lucifer by a face-painted high priest, while a group of people watch. The voice-over informs us that the actress who was 'sacrificed' is putting herself through college by staging such theatrical scenes... In San Francisco we see Sally, a black prostitute, drain her client Edwin of his sperm and donate it to an unofficial 'sperm bank' run by Sunella Parker, who bathes in the ejaculate and claims it has rejuvenating powers. Midnight Porno's link-woman then makes love with Sunella, and agrees to collect sperm for her. Afterwards, we see her making out with a drunken client and collecting three loads from him... In Copenhagen we witness a live sex show involving the Schlamp family – mother, daughter and father. The TV-show hostess makes for the*

backstage area and has sex with the daughter. Next we visit Hamburg's famous Reeperbahn, and encounter a dominatrix called "The Bride of Satan" who explains her role-playing services as a form of therapy. The hostess of Midnight Porno joins her and the two women perform their special arts on two males. We see her with a male client who likes to be stood on and whipped, and another man who is ridden like a horse until he collapses exhausted. Leaving behind the world of "intellectuals and decadent sophisticates" we head for Agoa ("a gorgeous, primitive island") to observe an "erotic traditional ritual" designed to prepare a bride for marriage: tradition demands that she first be deflowered by her godfather before the groom can have his turn. In Amsterdam, we pay a visit to an adult sex education class run by the Midnight Porno hostess, in which she explains such puzzling matters as the correct way to masturbate, and the right way to handle a blow-up doll. In Istanbul we visit a club where a sitar player accompanies a black dancer. In a back room, a form of nude yoga crossed with interpretative dancing segues into a sexual coupling. Finally, the hostess wishes us goodnight, but not before inviting viewers to call her at the station and suggest some more adventurous escapades for next week's episode...

Production notes: On the Elite DVD release for *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, Erwin Dietrich talked about the fifteen films Franco made for him. However, with *In 80 Betten um die Welt*, which emerged in 2014 as part of Ascot-Elite's "Jess Franco Golden Goya Collection", the tally rose to sixteen. *In 80 Betten um die Welt* was previously thought to be one of Dietrich's own films (like *Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel* it's credited to Manfred Gregor on the poster artwork) but it turns out that it was one of a trio of sex films Franco made virtually simultaneously for Dietrich in early 1976. The footage of various cities, which is dotted throughout the film to give the impression of a globetrotting production, looks to have been collected piecemeal later, in the summer of 1976 (an establishing shot of Amsterdam city centre with a banner proclaiming the start of the annual Holland Festival point to a June 1976 shooting period), but some shots of New York may have been filmed earlier that year. However it's highly unlikely that Franco filmed them himself, bearing in mind the constraints under which he was working in 1976

Around the time that *In 80 Betten um die Welt* was shot, Franco attempted to gain some 'wriggle room' in his contract with Dietrich. In a letter dated 26 March 1976, Dietrich squashed one such proposal, informing Franco, "I formally tell you that I do not have permission to employ and pay [Gerald] Casal, and to take on whatever may be his fee, because of police and work permits for foreigners – at this moment at least fifty cameramen in Switzerland of Swiss nationality are without work, and obliged to go seeking compensation. Any breach of the law on my side will take me to jail."¹ Is it cynical to suppose that the reason Franco wanted Dietrich to employ Gerald Casal (aka Gerald Cazal) was because he was hoping to place a previously reliable collaborator in the Elite Film ranks? Cazal had worked with Franco, usually as assistant director, on at least five films in 1975: *Midnight Party*, *Shining Sex*, *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Downtown* and



Scenes from *In 80 Betten um die Welt*:
 TOP ROW: Paul Nussbaumer gets tuition from Esther Moser, and an unknown Dietrich regular joins Moser on the white shagpile.
 MIDDLE ROW LEFT: A blushing bride (Esther Studer) is about to be deflowered by her godfather (Eric Falk) in an 'Angoan fertility ceremony', attended by Esther Moser (left) and Lorli Bucher (right).
 MIDDLE ROW RIGHT: Visiting sex lecturer Sunella Parker (Vera Chollet) joins the host of TV's 'Midnight Porno' (Esther Moser, seated behind).
 BOTTOM ROW LEFT: Eric Falk with Vera Chollet on the 'Midnight Porno' TV set. This scene is missing from the currently available release version.
 BOTTOM ROW RIGHT: Esther Moser and Vera Chollet prepare to enjoy one another's charms on Elite Films' ubiquitous shaggy-rug-cum-bedspread.

Die Sklavinnen. Perhaps Franco was hoping that Cazal would be chosen as director of photography on future assignments instead of Peter Baumgartner, the latter of whom was not only Dietrich's chief dp but also his best friend and business partner!

Review: Given enough time, it seems that Jess Franco would have happily remade every one of his films. His work for Erwin Dietrich is a kaleidoscope of themes already laid out in earlier projects, with the added lubricity of explicit sex and lashings of sleazy violence. Already during the Dietrich years, *Barbed Wire Dolls* had returned to the plot of *99 Women*; *Die Marquise von Sade* revisited the themes of *Female Vampire*, and *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* had riffed on *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. Later in the Franco-Dietrich cycle, *Jack the Ripper* would prove to be a thinly disguised remake of *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, *Blue Rita* would revisit *The Girl from Rio*, and *Voodoo Passion* would recycle *Nightmares Come at Night*. In *80 Betten um die Welt* dusts off Franco's absurdist 'mondo' movie *Jungfrauen-Report*, taking us around the world (from the USA to Europe to Turkey) to observe sexual peccadilloes with a flippant tongue-in-cheek attitude. And just like *Jungfrauen-Report* it sees the cast playing multiple roles. Those who are present at a supposed New York black mass also turn up in a Copenhagen sex show: Roman Huber, for instance, is featured prominently during the black mass sequence and then plays the man making out with his wife and daughter on stage in Copenhagen. Eric Falk plays a Hamburg masochist being ridden like a horse by two dominatrices, then returns as the godfather of a South Sea island girl who takes the young woman's virginity during a bizarre pre-marriage ritual. The exception is Vera Chollet, whose recurring character is described as a sort of sex tourist, thus explaining her appearances in various locations around the world.

It's not just the actors who are recycled: everywhere the same old props are re-used: a fluffy white rug, which had already appeared in just about every scene in *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln* and *Girls in the Night Traffic*, turns up 'all around the world' in *In 80 Betten um die Welt*. Rumour has it that by the time these movies were finished it was so drenched in bodily fluids that it crawled away and hired its own agent.

But if *In 80 Betten um die Welt* is just a slightly stale bon-bon, the frivolity and silliness of which means it's clearly not meant to be taken seriously, some aspects are as annoying as they are ridiculous. A stereotypical camp gay man (played in lipstick by tubby Dietrich regular Mike Lederer) takes part in a 'masturbation class' during the film's final segment, but despite the swinging permissive dialogue professing an 'anything goes' attitude, he's only there to be anally penetrated by a dildo-wielding woman. It seems that homosexual pleasure has no place in Jess's world unless it's reconfigured to involve women. This, to the say the least, rather misses the point, and is sadly typical of his approach to this particular form of sexuality. It falls outside of his own range of preferred behaviour, so it only pops up on his erotic radar if he can shoe-horn a woman into the proceedings. (See *Elles font tout* and *Hotel de los ligues* for more

examples of Franco's heteronormativity.) Luckily, gay men are well practised when it comes to finding cinematic pleasure against the grain of heterosexual presentation: perhaps the sight of beefy love-machine Eric Falk, on his knees in a leather harness being ridden like a prize bull, can compensate for the insults elsewhere?

It's possible to get at least some amusement from the bizarre dialogue and wacky performances, but there's really very little to see here. It's about as lazy and half-hearted a 'movie' as Franco ever made, directed with all the enthusiasm of a convict sewing mailbags. The whole thing is stitched together by the sexy host of the 'Midnight Porno' TV channel, played by Esther Moser, who gives introductory monologues to each section and participates in the sex scenes too. Despite her importance to the structure of the film, and despite being the only really likeable character, she doesn't even get a name, an oversight which shows just how casually this effort was slung together. Exuding a distinct aura of sloppy seconds, or the last squeezings from a fruit that's already been dejuiced, *In 80 Betten um die Welt* shows nothing of the talent of Jess Franco and finds him simply marking time on a movie production line, waiting for a better opportunity. Fortunately, such a project was just around the corner...

Music: Familiar Walter Baumgartner cues.

Locations: There's no evidence to suggest that Franco travelled the world shooting material for this film, nor any likelihood that Erwin Dietrich wasted money sending a second unit to do a job that stock footage would do just as well. All we can say is that *someone* shot footage in New York, San Francisco, Copenhagen, Hamburg and Istanbul. Note however that while the film is comprised almost entirely of studio and stock footage, there is one exception: before the Agoa island sequence there's a quick montage of five exterior shots, of palm trees, a sunny beach, and dense foliage. These shots bear the hallmark of Franco's camera style, and the greenery in the final shot looks very much like Portuguese location material to me. I suspect that this shot was culled from material Franco filmed several months later: *In 80 Betten um die Welt* wasn't released in Germany until June 1977, leaving plenty of time for the addition of a shot from one of his Portuguese-lensed films – *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* perhaps, or *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*.

Connections: The 42nd Street footage beneath the opening credits boasts a quadruple bill of sex films playing at the Harem Cinema. Two are fairly easily identified: 'Love Temple' is probably *Roman Love Temple* aka *Roman Love Temple 69 B.C.* (1969), while *Hot Cat* is an alternative title for *The Joy of Letting Go* (released in New York in June 1976). The other two are mysteries: I'm unable to find out anything about *Sexual Grip* and *High Sex* ... Vera Chollet and Eric Falk can be seen together in the far more erotic Jack Guy sex film *Exaspération sexuelle*, a French-Belgian co-production made the same year. Comparing Falk's sex scenes in *Exaspération sexuelle* to those in Franco's films demonstrates that Jess had zero ability (or zero interest) when it came to fostering masculine arousal in his cast: Falk seems genuinely turned on in Guy's film, which makes a change from his mugging, absurdist performances for Franco and

Dietrich. (Marlène Myller from *Julietta 69* and Roger Germanes from *Female Vampire* can also be seen in the Jack Guy film, which is known under the alternative title *Breakfast Sex*) ... Playing in Copenhagen is the film *Uden en traevl* starring Anne Grete Nissen and Ib Mossin ... Much of the material purporting to be filmed at a Turkish nightclub, featuring guests watching a sitar player and a black dancer, is lifted from *Mädchen Im Nachtehrker*. In this segment, only the extensive Oriental dance scene with Esther Studer and an unknown male was created specifically for *In 80 Betten um die Welt* ... A shot from the black mass sequence, showing Mike Lederer caressing the nude and spread-eagled Esther Studer with a sword, turns up at the end of Jack Guy's *Tänzerinnen für Tanger* (1977), a Dietrich-produced film that not only purloins this material from Franco but also uses just about the same cast and musical cues to which Franco was restricted during this period ... A shot in which Esther Moser enjoys a kiss 'backstage' with a sex show performer gives us a glimpse of the working environment at Dietrich's studios. The scene takes place behind studio scenery for interiors, with lights and discarded production equipment piled up. We can also see in the background a dismantled bamboo cage prop that featured in *Mädchen Im Nachtehrker*.

Other versions: *In 80 Betten um die Welt* should not be confused with *Jarretelles roses sur bas noirs* (1981), a French porno film by Gérard Loubeau released in Spain as *Los amores impuros de Sybille*, despite the Blu-ray cover for *In 80 Betten um die Welt* 'borrowing' the Spanish poster artwork for Loubeau's film and simply flipping it horizontally!

JACK THE RIPPER

(SWI Blu-ray/UK & US DVD)

West Germany, 1976

Alternative titles

Jack l'éventreur (FR theatrical) *Jack the Ripper*
Jacques de Vrouwenslchter (BEL Dutch-language theatrical)
Jacques l'éventreur (BEL French-language theatrical)
Jack el destripador (ARG theatrical) *Jack the Ripper*
Erotico Profondo (IT theatrical) *Deep Erotica*
Nož za Prostitutke (YUG theatrical) *A Knife for the Prostitutes*
Sohon Teurastaja aka **Slaktaren från Soho** (FIN theatrical)
The Soho Butcher
Viiltäjä (FIN video) *The Ripper*
Jack the Ripper Der Dirnenmörder Von London (WG poster)
Jack the Ripper The Prostitute Killer of London

Production company

Cinemec-Film (Berlin)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (SW/West Germany)

Cineshowcase Releasing (USA)

Victoria Films (Belgium)

World Sales

Elite Film (Zürich)

Timeline

Shooting date	01-25 June	1976
German 18-cert 48553 issued	21 September	1976
Germany – premiere	23 September	1976
Zürich	06 December	1976
French visa 48852 issued	31 March	1978
France provincial release	26 April	1978
Paris	31 January	1979
San Severo (southern Italy)	30 January	1979
Turin	27 February	1979
Rome	02 March	1979
Albuquerque (New Mexico, USA)	13 July	1979
Los Angeles	09 January	1981

Theatrical running time

Germany	91m05s
USA	85m

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	92m
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director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. executive producer: **Max Dora**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. production manager: **Edouard A. Stöckli** [as 'Eduard A. Stöckli']. location manager: **Peter Spoerri**. assistant directors: **Mark Rissi**, **Alfons Sinniger**. set design: **Rolf Engler**. camera assistant: **Rudolf Küttel**. props: **Bernhard Sauter**, **Rolf Krebs**. costume design: **Silvia de Stoutz**. wardrobe: **Ellen Salzmann**. make-up: **Jakob Peier**, **Rita Burkhart**. editor: **Marie-Louise Buschke**. sound: **Hubertus Schmandtke**, **Klaus Hein**. German version: **Avco Film** (Berlin). title design: **Studio Bartoschek**. sound effects: **Hans-Wlatter Kramski**, **Karlheinz Reiber**. music: **Walter Baumgartner** (©1976. VIP Musik). A **Cinemec-Film** production (Munich). world sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich). Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: editor: **Peter Baumgartner**. Kinski is dubbed by German voice artist **Fred Maire**.

Cast: **Klaus Kinski** (Dr. Dennis Orloff). **Josephine Chaplin** (Cynthia). **Andreas Mannkopf** (Inspector Anthony Selby). **Herbert Fux** (Charlie, a fisherman). **Lina Romay** (Marika Hoffman, a cabaret dancer). **Nikola Weisse** (Flora [GER: Frieda], Orloff's servant). **Ursula V. [von] Wiese** (Mrs. Higgins). **Hans Gaugler** (Mr. Pritchard, the blind 'witness'). **Francine Custer** (Sally Brown, the 1st victim). **Olga Gebhard** (Mrs. Baxter, Orloff's landlady). **Angelika Arndts** (Mrs. Stevenson, Marika's Mother).

The Ripper surveys his handiwork after carving up vivacious stripper Marika Hoffman (Eina Romay).



ERWIN C. DIETRICH



KLAUS KINSKI
ist

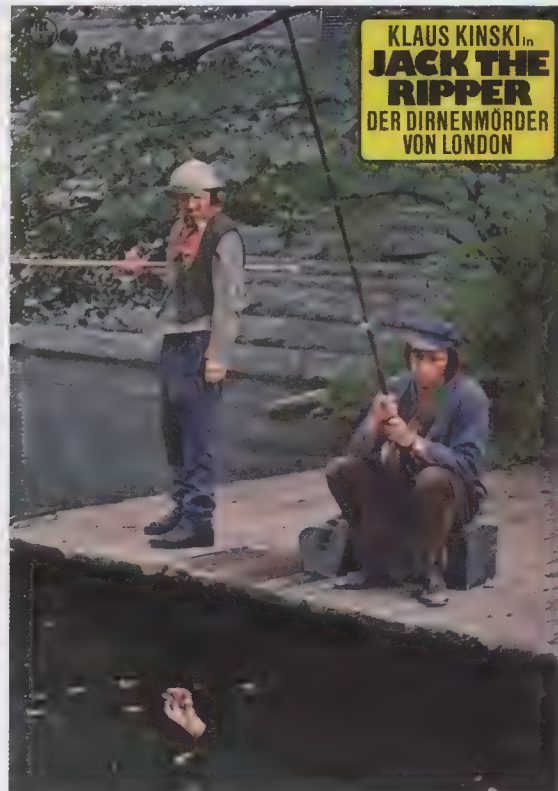
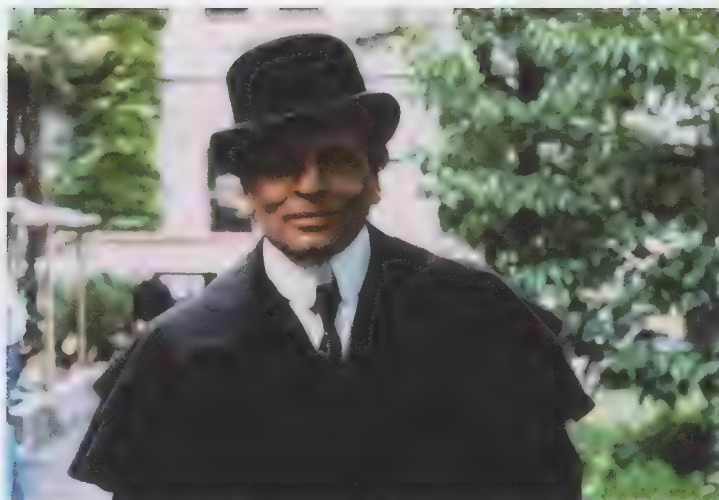
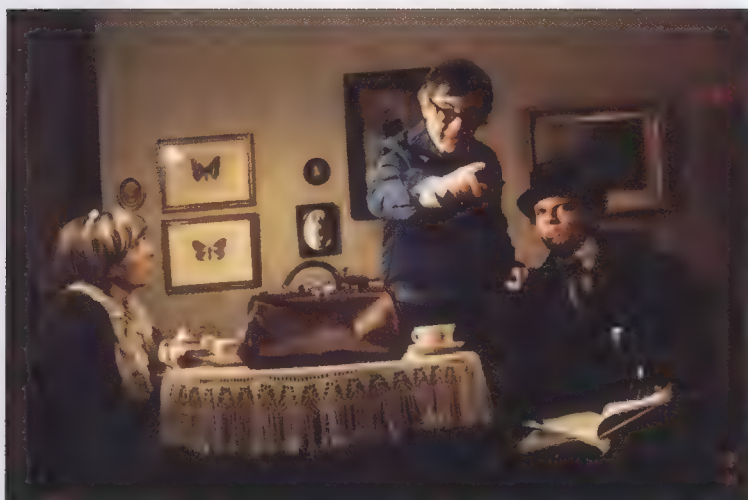


**JACK THE
RIPPER**

DER DIRNENMÖRDER VON LONDON



KLAUS KINSKI in
**JACK THE
RIPPER**
DER DIRNENMÖRDER
VON LONDON



Clockwise from top left: (1) Franco directs a scene from *Jack the Ripper*, with Olga Gebhard (as Mrs. Baxter, Orloff's landlady) and Klaus Kinski as the titular killer, Dr. Dennis Orloff. (2) Kinski smiles! (3) Franco and cinematographer Peter Baumgartner (wearing jacket) prepare a shot on Zürich's Schanzengraben Canal. (4) Charlie (Herbert Fux) and his friend (Otto Dornbierer) find evidence of the Ripper's activities. (5) Marika Hoffman (Lina Romay), a cabaret dancer who meets a terrible fate at the Ripper's hands. (6) Franco discusses a scene with Hans Gaugler (playing the blind witness Mr. Pritchard) and Francine Custer (as the Ripper's first victim Sally Brown).

Peter Nüsch [as 'Peter Nuesch'] (Sergeant Rupert). **Regine Elsener** (Blondy). **Esther Studer** (Jeanie, the 2nd victim). **Lorli Bucher** (Maggie, the brothel madame). **Mike Lederer** (Collins the coach driver). **Otto Dornbierer** (Charlie's friend). *Uncredited*: **Walter Baumgartner** (ballet school pianist). **Roman Huber** (bowler-hatted police sergeant). *Obsession* and *The Manacoe Files* add Friedrich Schoenfelder as "Major Bentley".

Synopsis: *Dr. Denis Orloff is a quiet, respectable London physician by day, and 'Jack the Ripper' by night. He rapes and murders prostitutes, then drags the corpses back to his clinic for mutilation and dismemberment, after which Flora, his devoted housemaid, disposes of the bodies in the River Thames. The latest victim is one Sally Brown. Inspector Anthony Selby of Scotland Yard and his assistant, Rupert, are having no luck solving the case, nor is Selby having much luck with his fiancée Cynthia, a ballerina; their relationship is close to collapse because both of them put career interests first. One night, while lying in his room, Orloff sees a vision of Cynthia, whom we are told he recently fixated upon after observing outside the ballet school. In the vision, Cynthia assumes the role of a prostitute, taunting Orloff, making lascivious suggestions, and remarking upon her resemblance to Orloff's dead mother. Afterwards, Orloff visits a prostitute called Jeanie who works from a brothel above a pub. He leaves her body cut up and strewn around the bedroom, where she's discovered by Maggie, the brothel madam, and another prostitute who lives directly next door. Charlie, a fisherman, snags a severed human hand on his line; he goes to the police who begin a murder investigation. Inspector Selby arranges for a sketch artist to make a drawing based on various eye-witness descriptions, and employs the assistance of Mr. Pritchard, a blind beggar with a hyper-developed sense of smell, but despite these unusual innovations the investigation stalls. Orloff strikes again, this time seducing Marika Hoffman, a sexy dancer at the Pike's Hole cabaret bar, and taking her to Kensington Park, where he murders her. Charlie, the fisherman, figures out that Orloff is responsible after witnessing him acting suspiciously on the riverbank. The unscrupulous fellow decides to try and blackmail Orloff but instead he becomes his next victim. Determined to help, Cynthia, goes undercover as a 'woman of the night' to flush out the maniac. Instead, she too falls into the killer's clutches...*

Production notes: In April 1976, Jess Franco suggested to Erwin Dietrich a horror film based on the infamous case of Jack the Ripper. It would be set in Victorian London, an undertaking far more ambitious than Dietrich was accustomed to. Franco provided a breakdown of the projected costs, and drew up a plan that would have seen him shooting for half a week in London and three weeks in the South of France. The project was designed from the start with Klaus Kinski as the leading man, and Franco initially favoured Edmond Purdom for the Inspector (a role eventually played by Andreas Mannkopf). The budget, excluding Franco's fee, was estimated at 149,800 Swiss francs (approximately £32,000, or £174,500 in today's money). Dietrich agreed to the proposal, but he was not about to send Franco off to Nice again, so the two

men came to an agreement to shoot the film in Zürich. Kinski's casting was confirmed in May, and although Franco had originally costed his involvement for a period of two weeks, by the time the final shooting plan was worked out the actor was needed for only seven days.

Jack the Ripper went before the cameras on June 2nd 1976, shooting for three weeks. As speed was of the essence on such an expensive production, live dialogue recording was ruled out. Speaking on a commentary track for the Ascot-Elite DVD release, Dietrich explained, "*Jack the Ripper was shot without any sound. All dialogue on location was spoken in whatever language the actors preferred to talk. Later on we edited the film according to the script and wrote a dialogue script in German. We consider German to be the original version of this film. It was the first version we did and the English version is a dubbed version of the German original.*"¹ Franco was barred from operating the camera, and the director of photography, Peter Baumgartner, took a much more pivotal role. Franco acknowledged that Baumgartner was a professional who knew what he was doing, but he had reservations. As he told Marian D. Botulino in 2001: "*Baumgartner works as a cameraman in a very classical way. I would have preferred different camera work. Of course you can do it that way. I really like the movie. The lighting also comes from Baumgartner. Baumgartner lights up a scene completely, in the classical way, as it is taught. I prefer a more realistic illumination, e.g. a light from one side only. Or very often backlight, and then only a weaker extra light, from the direction of the camera. If the natural light is good, I do without additional light. For example, I only use a reflector screen, which makes the facial contours appear softer. Naturally, I also chose the camera point of view for Jack the Ripper, as with any of my other films, even if I did not operate the camera myself.*"² It's worth pointing out here that Peter Baumgartner recalls things differently. In an interview conducted by Uwe Huber for the DVD release of Erwin Dietrich's *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst*, he stated, "*The collaboration with Jess Franco on Jack the Ripper and Portuguese Nun was appealing to me because he left me with a lot of freedom, regarding the composition of the images and the creation of mood.*"³ In the same interview he makes a startling claim about the script of the film: "*Jess came back from Paris and had met Jean-Claude Carrière. At the time he [Carrière] was Luis Buñuel's chief screen-writer, writing for many acclaimed films. Jess told Jean-Claude about his current project. He said, 'I'm shooting Jack the Ripper, here's an outline'. Jean-Claude wrote the adaptation. But he didn't want to be named. I don't know why.*" One also wonders why Jess neglected to mention this in later years, as he was always very proud of his association with the gifted co-writer of Buñuel's *Belle de jour*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and *The Phantom of Liberty*. The two of them had worked together in 1965, writing *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Attack of the Robots*, and Franco later claimed that his films *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* (1982) and *Broken Dolls* (1999) were based on an idea given to him by Carrière.⁴

According to documentation passed to me by Uwe Huber, Franco had another ambitious project lined up for shooting immediately after *Jack the Ripper*, called "Black Nana". The subject

matter remains a mystery, but we do have a list of intended cast members – William Berger, Maria Schell, Thomas Hunter and Antonella Lualdi – and Franco's projected budget outline, which puts the price tag at a hefty 161,300 Swiss francs; even more expensive than *Jack the Ripper*. One imagines the cost played a part in the project's abandonment. As for the subject, could "Black Nana" have been related to the project called "Black Cobra", which Franco had planned to make in 1970 with Harry Alan Towers before they parted company? If so, perhaps the August 1976 release of *Eva nera*, Joe D'Amato's film based on the same treatment, made with Towers as executive producer, put the mockers on Franco's version.

Review: In a 1999 review of *My Best Fiend*, Werner Herzog's documentary about his tempestuous working relationship with Klaus Kinski, the American film critic Roger Ebert declared, "Herzog made five films starring Kinski. No other director ever worked with him more than once."⁵ Jess Franco actually made four films with Kinski (*Venus in Furs*, *Justine*, *Count Dracula* and *Jack the Ripper*) and while they may have failed to attract Ebert's gaze, this was quite an achievement when dealing with such a reputedly 'difficult' actor. Franco was evidently someone to whom Kinski could relate; their relationship was by all accounts very cordial. Speaking in January 1977, Kinski – never one to dish out praise lightly – had this to say about Franco: "He's the exact opposite of so many others. In a way, I'll always stick up for him. He shoots in his own style, very fast, very swift, he doesn't dwell on things. He makes films with whatever he has to hand, and that's where his talent lies; he can make you weep by his ability to bring out what's inside people."⁶ Erwin Dietrich has pointed out that during the time he worked on *Jack the Ripper* Kinski put in close to fifteen hours a day, almost twice as long as he was contracted for.⁷ Given Kinski's famously volatile temperament, such commitment to getting the film in the can shows that he respected Franco as a man working for the love of cinema, pushing against the limits of what he could afford in order to achieve something special.

Jack the Ripper is a handsome and expensive looking film, constructed with care and sobriety on a budget that would have probably made Hammer's directors laugh out loud. What it is *not* is a serious attempt to offer a possible solution to the unsolved Ripper case. Franco is completely uninterested in trawling the historical record and coming up with plausible new theories; instead, with breathtaking chutzpah, he uses the case to re-stage, sometimes scene by scene, his horror debut *The Awful Dr. Orloff*. Franco was quite open about this at the time, telling Swiss journalist Hans D. Furrer, "*Jack the Ripper* like Orloff, is a man who has paranoid phases in his normal, unremarkable life, in which he commits his horrendous crimes. He is also a Puritan like Orloff ... There are essentially two versions of the story. One is that *Jack the Ripper*, who was never convicted, was a member of the British Royal Family. This version is probably closest to the truth, but I decided – as political films do not interest me – for the second option. In this case, *Jack the Ripper* was an Argentine

doctor who lived in a London suburb and lived a very simple and solid life. One day they surprised him in a dispute with a prostitute in the London underworld. he was subsequently expelled from England, without his crimes being attributed to him. One thing is for sure in both versions: the murderer was a doctor and he knew anatomy very well. After he had killed his victim, he cut her into pieces. Well, I needed my *Jack the Ripper* to have a name. So why not Orloff? He is my favorite such figure and I had the opportunity, this time, to shoot a larger Orloff film. One thing that's very important to me in this film is that I was lucky enough to get the actor Klaus Kinski. I have already made several films with him. He is an actor I admire, and my Orloff is an ideal role for Kinski."⁸ And he was upbeat about the film on its completion: "For the moment I think it's my best film. I had the opportunity to work in a suitable atmosphere, with more resources and opportunities than usual, and with a great actor! I think Klaus Kinski is one of the great performers in fantastic film. His personality, his magnetism, his way of playing, I love to work with him – he understands very well how to play a character like *Jack the Ripper*, for him it seems to be the easiest thing in the world. If you give him the opportunity to make such a complete person, he is extraordinary. We shot one scene for example, which in the screenplay was to last under a minute. It shows the loneliness of the prostitute killer in his attic, withdrawn in the study of his medical books, beset by memories of the past. This scene is now four minutes, and I'm confident that viewers will not get bored. On the contrary, you will be fascinated..."⁹

Despite what one might expect, this is a restrained affair for the most part, and its central character likewise. Kinski is remote and glacial in the role, giving us a maniac so deeply repressed that even whilst hacking up his victims he barely snarls. We see the career professional, the doctor, the Victorian gentleman, but almost nothing of the brute sadist raging within. Kinski, who was more than capable of unleashing cataclysmic rage onscreen, plays this monster – a murderous misogynist who slashes up women and carves out their entrails – in a stony, almost mask-like way, relying entirely on his unusual physiognomy to suggest derangement. The only point at which he lets go, just for a moment, is in a horse-drawn carriage when talking to Lina Romay, who plays a sexy dancer and prospective victim. "Are you taking me to Sherwood Forest?" she deadpans (for those who don't know, Sherwood Forest is about 180 miles from London), before snuggling up to him in full 'sex-kitten' mode. As they banter together, Kinski smiles – a warm, genuine smile – inspired I would guess by Romay's vivacity and playfulness. Apart from this merriment, however, when it comes to displaying emotion he makes Clint Eastwood look like Mr. Bean. On first viewing of *Jack the Ripper*, some years ago, I was convinced that Kinski was short-changing Franco by refusing to put himself into the part. However, it's clear from the aforementioned interviews that Kinski and Franco got along very well, so we must assume that they created this granite-faced killer by mutual arrangement. One can see the reasoning; Victorian repression writ large. It's just that in your mind's eye you can see the Kinski who raged ferociously at a theatre audience in *My Best Fiend*, and you can't help wishing for that version to come out to play.





Clockwise from top: (1) Franco directs Klaus Kinski as the titular killer, Dr. Dennis Orloff, with Francine Custer as his first victim Sally Brown. An out-of-costume Lina Romay leans into shot on the left. (2) Franco attending to costumes. (3) Franco prepares a scene with Kinski and Esther Studer (playing Jeanie, the killer's second victim).



Top row: Franco waits as the crew line up a shot of the Ripper. (top left picture © Eric Bachmann, used by permission.)
Bottom: Franco and Kinski in conversation with Francine Custer.



Once you adjust to the leading man's performance there are plenty of other details to enjoy. The most unusual is the suggestion of female complicity in the crimes: Franco invents Flora, an accomplice of the Ripper who helps to hide the bodies and even tips him off when he's about to be apprehended. In a rare gesture of macabre affection we see the Ripper stroke a gloved finger along a scar on Flora's temple: evidence of a botched brain operation, if her dysfunctional behaviour is anything to go by. In a subtle detail, however, Franco makes it clear that Flora is not simply brain-damaged or delusional. We see her rowing her boat along the river with a corpse tied up in a sack, looking for a suitable spot to dispose of her cargo. Passing a fisherman on the bank, she jokes as she glides by, telling him that what she's carrying feeds the fishes that in turn will feed him. Evidently, despite referring to the corpses as 'dolls' to play with, she knows they're flesh and blood. Then there's the public house at the centre of the story, called Pike's Hole – a four-sided play on words, being a plausible pub name, a reference to a wound created by a sharp implement, a pungently misogynistic reference to the vagina's oft-remarked association with fish, and a nod to the Freudian notion of the vagina perceived by the male child as the remnants of castration. Orloff's pushy neighbour Mrs. Baxter is good value too, as she lies in wait for him at all hours of the day and night trying to nuzzle him into her parlour for tea. And let's not forget the ribald song and dance performed by victim-to-be Lina Romay, which is especially memorable if you're a fan of the actress's behind...

It's also worth pointing out that, as per usual with Franco, the victims are not exactly sympathetic. The first, a prostitute, hurls coarse insults at a friendly coach-driver who offers her safe refuge in his cab, while Charlie the working class fisherman is a detestable money-grabber who, not satisfied that the gentleman Doctor is offering free medical treatment, tries to exploit his good nature for a loan. When he figures out the Doctor is actually the Ripper, he tries to turn the situation to his advantage with blackmail, rather than reporting him to the police! These Victorian low-lives are detestable parasites, the film seems to say: do anything for them and they'll slap you in the face! Not exactly a message that would have appealed to Dickens and Conan-Doyle, though Edgar Wallace might have gone for it... On a lighter note, the dialogue has that skew-whiff charm that comes from Continental engagement with British regional argot: "*Blimey, Sally was angry because he'd wanted a queer sort of rut, bloody swine!*" says a Cockney coach driver to the police, giving evidence so jam-packed with vernacular you'd think he was getting paid by the slang word. The altogether posher Dr. Orloff, meanwhile, upon seeing a vision of Cynthia as his prostitute mother, rages, "*You shared your bed with every rotter who came along!*", a choice of insult that drastically undersells the killer's outrage!

On the visual front, little details like the shrinking of the mighty River Thames to a waterway barely thirty feet across can be excused as necessary cost-cutting (it would have been far too expensive to widen Zürich's Schanzengraben Canal), while Franco's most

startling digression from historical fact – the Ripper is captured by Scotland Yard! – is cause for celebration not criticism. Let's face it, you can overdo grim realism. There are plenty of experts out there in the literary backstreets of Ripper publishing who swear they know who the killer was; it's therefore quite refreshing to see Franco firing the arrow of enquiry randomly into the sky, then climaxing his tale with an actual collar for the police! Ripper obsessives be warned, Franco's film will grate on your nerves like a knifeblade on an exposed sternum; there are innumerable digressions from historical record and little in the way of credible research. If you find these changes hard to stomach, try to remember that the breast-hacking gut-slashing monster of the film is called Dennis. This is the story of *Dennis the Ripper*, evidently up to the same sort of business as Saucy Jack, at around the same time, just as the eponymous hero of *Monty Python's Life of Brian* happened to gain a following at the same time as Jesus...

A little harder to shrug off is Dennis Orloff's hallucination sequence, in which Cynthia comes to him in the guise of a painted strumpet. "*I am exactly like your mother – a whore. I'll be yours for a crown,*" she says, offering a thwacking great revelation about the killer's psyche, ignoring tedious old writing advice like 'show don't tell' or 'reveal character through action'. The script then forgets about such weighty psychological matters for an hour, only returning to the theme in the closing minutes when Orloff spouts a litany of reasons for hating his slutty mother: apparently she was a sexually voracious whore, who touched him up, laughed at him, and misquoted Shakespeare while modelling a revealing basque. Some critics have derided this aspect of the film, and it's true that we're not exactly in the hands of a master psychoanalyst here: 'serial killers have mother issues' just about covers it. But then, psychological depth in characterisation is rarely evident in Franco's films. The real flaw here is the absence of a scene in which Orloff sees Cynthia first in the real world, not fantasy; instead it falls to 'hallucinatory Cynthia' to mention the occasion ("*You wanted me ever since the day you first saw me, coming out of the ballet studio*"). Somehow it just doesn't feel right to have a woman in a feverish sex hallucination info-dumping vital exposition to make up for missing scenes earlier.

The violence is sparingly distributed but impressive when it comes. There are three 'orrible murders, guv'nor, plus one excruciatingly 'orrible lance-bursting scene at Orloff's clinic, the grossness of which is a welcome attack of bad taste in an otherwise sensible production. Of the three killings, only one is a baroque extravagance: the rest of the crimes come down to a couple of brief insert shots and a few grisly aftermath trophies: breasts on a dressing table, a severed hand, an eye still encased in its lids, that sort of thing. The honourable exception comes with the murder of Lina Romay's cheeky young tart Marika, at which point all restraint is abandoned and the gore lurches into Herschell Gordon Lewis territory. Kinski hacks off Lina's breasts, chops off her hands, and generally makes a mighty old mess of her. As in the first murder, there's an obvious insert shot during Orloff's pre-mutilation

molestation of the shrieking victim. You can tell it was added later because there's no attempt to match Peter Baumgartner's original photography. (Little wonder – the surrounding sequence is a model of style and creativity that wouldn't look out of place in a Mario Bava film.) It's this collision between crudity and class, between Herschell Gordon Lewis gore and Mario Bava lighting – that makes *Jack the Ripper* such an odd duck of a film, but also so compellingly amusing.

Even for Franco obsessives, however, *Jack the Ripper* is likely to be seen as a bit of a curate's egg. So much is right, yet still there's something lacking. Visually it's as good as, or even better than, the films Franco made for Harry Alan Towers: the lighting, camerawork and mise-en-scène are a triumph for the budget. Franco would never again make such an expensive-looking horror film. But while *Jack the Ripper* is carefully shot and often quite beautiful, it remains, in the end, a frustrating film that falls short of its considerable potential. While it's clear that Franco and Klaus Kinski spent some time deciding how to depict the film's central monster, I know I'm not alone in wishing they'd opted for a more lurid display of acting fireworks.

Cast and crew: Regular music composer for the Dietrich-Franco era, Walter Baumgartner (uncle of the film's director of photography, Peter Baumgartner), can be seen tickling the ivories at the ballet studio where Cynthia is training.

Music: The film benefits from some effective music that was thankfully not simply plucked from Dietrich's grab-bag of existing cues. The rusty fairground styling of the title music is especially memorable.

Locations: Shooting took place in Zürich during June of 1976. The most amusing feature of the film is the use of the city's Schanzengraben Canal (thirty feet wide) to stand in for the River Thames. Other Zürich locations include the cloister in Fraumünster church (where the first victim meets the Ripper), the Rindermarkt and the Theater am Neumarkt (which was redressed to portray the Pike's Hole tavern exterior), with further street scenes also captured in Steinbockgasse and Predigerasse. The plant-strewn chamber at Orloff's house was a room at the Botanical Gardens located near to the Schanzengraben Canal. Speaking to *Vampire* magazine in 1976 on the subject of establishing location with a few broad strokes, Franco remarked, "If the viewer sees a picture of the Eiffel Tower, then he is in Paris, even if the next scene filmed in Zürich. In London, it's the same with the Thames, Big Ben, or the old Scotland Yard. The cinema audience is international, and these shots are necessary. They give the viewer the impression that the story really happening in London."¹⁰ To foster this illusion, the production spent three days in London photographing landmarks, including the entrance to the Chelsea Physic Garden on Chelsea Embankment (ironically, just across the road from the actual River Thames) ... The interior hallway of Orloff's apartment (where he's accosted by his twittering landlady) was the entrance hall of the Villa Sonnenberg, set in wooded grounds off Sonnenbergstrasse in a well-to-do region of Zürich called Zürichberg. This rambling villa was used by Dietrich

as a studio for several years, so much so that his crews came to refer to it as "Studio Sonnenberg". On the *Jack the Ripper* commentary track, Dietrich explained that it belonged to a Swiss banker, but in the 1960s and 1970s it fell into disrepair and was left unattended. Squatters broke in and took over the house for many months. Once they were evicted, the owner was happy to let Dietrich use the place for free to discourage further invasions. It can also be seen in *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, *Blue Rita* and *Love Camp*.

Connections: As noted, Franco recycles here many elements of his debut horror picture *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, including a police artist sketching the wanted man, the investigating officer's dancer girlfriend using herself as bait to catch the killer, and a multitude of other echoes. (Also making a reappearance, rather wonderfully, is the blind, bearded, bespectacled beggar from another ostensibly London-set crime story by Franco, 1971's *Der Todesrächer Von Soho*.) ... The line heard during Orloff's vision – "And now this lustful Lord leapt from his bed, Is madly tossed between desire and dread, Bewitched with lust's foul charm" – paraphrases Shakespeare's poem, "The Rape of Lucrece" – an interesting choice, as it points toward a psychological fault-line in Franco's cinema. In his 1987 essay on the poem, Shakespeare scholar Joel Fineman observed that the tragic events which befall Lucrece are set in motion by the extravagant praise which her husband, Collatine, showers upon her: his boastfulness about his wife's chastity and sovereignty inflame the desire of the rapist, Tarquin, thus creating the circumstances that will lead to her violation.¹¹ One is reminded of the similar swing between adoration and destruction of the female that can be seen in so many Franco films. Indeed, *Jack the Ripper*, with its drastic mutilation of Lina Romay's body, seems to emanate from some dark reverse of the films Franco made between 1973 and 1975, in which Romay's powerful beauty so often mesmerised his camera. With Romay having been absent from Franco's films since the autumn of 1975, this particular role – its exorbitant brutality well in excess of Franco's usual levels – seems an odd and possibly significant choice for her return, especially given that in the intervening period between *Mandinga* in November 1975 and *Jack the Ripper* in August 1976, crisis had torn the 'Franco family' apart. Romay's husband Ramón Ardid left her, and for several years Franco's wife Nicole was no longer involved in his productions either. (They did however remain friends, and stayed in touch until Nicole's death in 1996.) Whatever transpired after Franco and Romay walked away from their responsibilities during the *Mandinga* débâcle, alienating at least one spouse in the process, it seems that director and star were kept apart, professionally speaking, for roughly nine months. Did Franco unconsciously blame Romay for the end of his marriage? If so, the brutal treatment meted out to her character in *Jack the Ripper* can be seen as a sort of exorcism of that anger, because from here onwards the two of them grew ever closer, and Romay's next role in a Franco film saw her culo firmly back in control...

French theatrical release: *Jack the Ripper* was one of only a handful of Erwin C. Dietrich productions to be released in France

(the others being *Blue Rita*, *Satanic Sisters* and *Voodoo Passion*). As *Jack l'éventreur* it opened on four screens (the Cinevog Saint-Lazare, the Hollywood Boulevard, the Broadway and the Ritz) on 31 January 1979, remaining on the Paris circuit for four weeks and returning for the odd screening as late as November 1982.

Other versions: If possible, one should always watch the subtitled German language version of this film, because the English audio track is monumentally awful. Many of the English lines are hopelessly garbled to fit the lip movements, and there's some truly atrocious acting from the dubbing artists (one of the prostitutes sounds as though she'd be more at home having cream tea at Windsor Castle). I have a high tolerance for bad dubbing – if you're a fan of Eurolease it's best not to get too picky – but it's such a shame here because Franco has clearly taken an unusual amount of care with the film ... Finally, one question that simply has to be asked: who came up with the Italian theatrical title *Erotico profondo*? If the words 'deep erotica' struck someone as an appropriate description for this dark and grisly film, I hope never to meet them on a dark night in Rome, Whitechapel, or anywhere else...

ILSA THE WICKED WARDEN

(US DVD/US theatrical re-issue title)

Switzerland/Canada, 1976

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Greta – Haus ohne Männer (SWI/WG)

Greta – House Without Men

Greta le tortionnaire (SWI French-speaking regions)

Alternative titles

Wanda the Wicked Warden (US theatrical)

Greta, the Mad Butcher (CAN theatrical/Swiss sales brochure/JAP video)

Greta la donna bestia (IT theatrical) *Greta the Beast Woman*

[Le] Pénitencier des femmes perverses (FR theatrical)

Penitentiary of Perverted Women

Greta le tortionnaire (SWI theatrical – newspaper listings)

Greta la tortionnaire aka Greta de wrede (BEL theatrical)

Greta the Torturer or Greta the Cruel

Ilsa: Absolute Power (US video)

Ilsa Ultimes Perversions (FR video on the 'Assaut Video' label)

Ilsa Ultimate Perversions

Ilsa Ultime perversion (FR video on 'California Visual' label)

Greta le pénitencier des femmes perverses (FR alt. video)

Ilsa la Tortionnaire (CAN video)

Ilse – Slagteren fra Junglefaengslet (DEN video)

Ilse – Butcher of the Jungle Prison

Greta, Huis Zonder Mannen (NL video)

Greta, House Without Men

Greta (GER DVD)

Ilsa the Mad Butcher (GER Blu-ray)

No Man's Land (English-language pre-shooting title)

Unconfirmed titles

Greta the Torturer

Greta, the Sadist

Ilsa: Ultimate Perversion

I sadistria tou stratopedou (GRE)

Elza – nikczemna strazniczka (POL DVD?)

Elza – Wicked Warden

Ильза – свирепая тюремщица (RUS DVD?)

Ilsa – A Fierce Wardress

Production company

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Aetas Film Production (Canada)

Theatrical distributors

Avis Filmverleih (SWI/West Germany)

Cinepix (USA/Canada) as *Wanda the Wicked Warden*

Timeline

Shooting in Portugal	17 August to Sept	1976
In Neues Filmprogramm catalog	January	1977
German 18-cert 48830 issued	18 January	1977
Germany	21 January	1977
Zürich	January	1977
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	09 March	1977
Canada (Montreal)	18 June	1977
Taranto (Italy)	04 August	1977
Turin	31 August	1977
Florence	07 September	1977
Reg. by Cinepix (at Library of Congress)*	16 October	1978
Rome	07 November	1978
Huntingdon USA (as <i>Wanda the...</i>)	24 January	1979
1st VHS release as <i>Ilsa the Wicked Warden</i>		1983

* as *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*

Theatrical running times

Germany 87m17s

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite 94m15s

director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'Manfred Gregor']. screenplay: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. director of photography: **Rudolf Küttel**. lighting: **Hans Zweifel**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. line producer: **Max Dora**. GER

press sheet adds: stills photographer: **Eric Bachmann**. artwork: **George Morf**. in Eastmancolor. world sales: **Elite Film Ltd** (Zürich); USA and Canada: **Cinépix Inc.** (Montreal).

Cast: **Dyanne Thorne** (Dr. Greta del Pino). **Lina Romay** (Juana Marez, prisoner N°10). **Tania Busselier** (Abigail 'Abbie' Phillips, 'Abelina García, N°41'). **Angela Ritschard** (Rosa Phillips, prisoner N°52). **Peggy Markoff** (Carla, prisoner N°14). **Esther Studer** (prisoner N°24). **Howard Maurer** (director of federal prisons). **Eric Falk** (Dr. Stefan Rego). *Credited on German pressbook only:* **Lorli Bucher** [as 'Lore Bucher'] (chief guard). **Mike Lederer** (stubbly convict in gang rape scene). **Esther Moser** (prisoner N°18 who creates diversion in the showers). **Roman Huber** (third convict in line in gang rape scene). **Marianne Lederer**. **Yvonne Eduser**. *Uncredited:* **Jesús Franco** (Dr. Milton Arcos). **Dagmar Bürger** (blonde prisoner, N°9). **Karl Gysling** (goateed convict in gang rape scene). **Sigad Sharaf** [aka Sigart Sharaf] (black prisoner, N°20). *IMDb adds:* Sandra L. Brennan. Alex Exler.

Notes: Some sources claim the actress playing Prisoner N°20 is not Sigad Sharaf but Yvonne Eduser.

Synopsis: *South America, the 1970s. Ilsa (or Greta if you prefer) is the warden of Las Palomas, a private clinic which specialises in female sexual abnormalities. However, in truth the clinic is a prison where various social undesirables and political prisoners are incarcerated. Ilsa herself is a sadistic lesbian who uses the women for her own sick amusement. The chief guard makes Super-8 films of the various atrocities and sells them to a man called Diaz. One patient, Rosa Phillips, manages to escape and finds her way through the jungle to the humanitarian and liberal activist Dr. Milton Arcos. Before Dr. Arcos can be of any help, Ilsa and her guards arrive to take the young woman away. Later, the Doctor is informed that she has died. Horrified, Dr. Arcos approaches a humanitarian rights organisation with his suspicions about the clinic. He is told the organisation shares his concern but without proof there's nothing they can do. Outside, he is met by Abbie Phillips, Rosa's sister, and the two of them hatch a plan to discover what really happened to Rosa. Doctor Arcos will have Abbie admitted to the clinic for a month, after which he will go to the clinic and insist that she be released due to a diagnostic error. But they reckon without Ilsa's wickedness and determination to stay on top. Within the clinic, brutal crimes are perpetrated against the inhabitants, including Abbie, who eventually discovers the awful fate of her sister. But can Ilsa cling to power indefinitely?*

Production notes: Kept at his producer's heel for the first half of 1976, Franco was itching for more freedom. He wasn't allowed to operate the camera, he couldn't employ Daniel White to score his films, and even the editing was handled by someone else. In his *Jack the Ripper* commentary track, Erwin Dietrich claimed that cinematographer Peter Baumgartner usually edited the Franco films with his own technical team, and while he may, as Dietrich declares, have known exactly what Franco wanted, it was a far cry

from the De Nesle productions, for which Franco had assembled work-prints on his own. However, after shooting *Jack the Ripper* he was able to persuade Dietrich that his next film, a return to the WIP genre, required a tropical setting. Dietrich agreed, and so in August 1976 Franco headed off to his favourite location, Sintra in Portugal. This time though, he would not be operating as a one man band: director of photography Rudolf Küttel, lighting specialist Hans Zweifel, and line producer Max Dora were all staunch Dietrich regulars, and Dora in particular was briefed to keep an eye on things. There was to be no hanky-panky; no little 'Manacoa productions' springing from the soil of Dietrich's budget. In an interview conducted immediately after the *Jack the Ripper* shoot, Franco described what he had in mind: "*A movie is already on paper. I like the English title, 'No Man's Land'. It's the story of a lunatic asylum for women; I hope the movie is pretty surreal.*"¹ The star for this journey into sado-sleaze was a big name in exploitation cinema: Ms. Dyanne Thorne, internationally infamous for *Ilsa She wolf of the SS*. According to her, Franco's script was "... *inspired by a real person who ran a sanatorium in Portugal where 'snuff' films were made of inmates for profit.*"²

Dietrich's decision to give Franco more freedom was influenced by two factors: the skilful job Franco had made of *Jack the Ripper*, and the profits coming in from *Frauengefängnis*, which was turning into a major hit for the studio. No doubt the latter also influenced the choice of subject matter for this new Franco assignment...

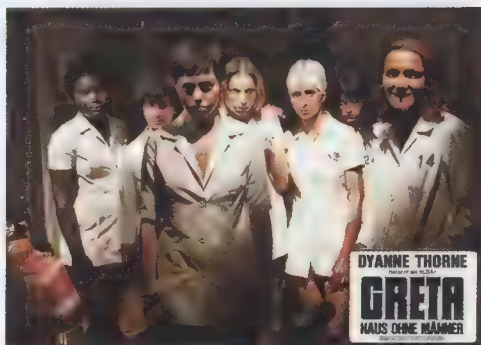
Review: Of all the films to emerge from the American exploitation independents of the 1970s, few offered as much bang for your buck as Don Edmonds's *Ilsa She wolf of the SS* (1974). This was exploitation cinema that really delivered, with sights and sounds that burned their way into your mind forever. Castration, brutal flagellation, torture and mutilation, Nazi medical experiments, plague sores, maggot-infested surgical wounds, a woman pissing on a man's face... *Ilsa She wolf of the SS* was a film that even the most lurid of ad campaigns was doomed to undersell. Director Don Edmonds revelled in outrage; *Ilsa* was designed to be tasteless and it took no prisoners in the furtherance of that aim. After all, as John Waters figured out before shooting the infamous dog-poop scene in *Pink Flamingos* (1972), if your audience are offended they're going to tell someone, and that's word-of-mouth, baby, the only promo money can't buy. Edmonds followed *Ilsa She wolf of the SS* with *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* (1975), which lacked the extra-special fizz of the Nazi theme but maintained the sicko sex-and-torture levels while adding an extra dose of camp humour. When Edmonds moved on, distributors John Dunning and André Link of Cinepix were eager for more of the same, so they looked around for other directors to continue the line. In 1976, tantalising press artwork circulated, promising "The Match of the Century – 'Ilsa Meets Bruce Lee in the Devil's Triangle' – Available Fall '76". Sadly this never materialised, and instead the Canadian director Jean Lafleur directed the third entry in the series, *Ilsa the Tigress of Siberia* (1977). Although it has some amusing moments, and



TOP ROW L TO R: Dr. Greta del Pino (Dyanne Thorne) with colleague and snuff film maker Dr. Stefan Rego (Eric Falk) ... Prisoner #13 finds Greta a less than progressive clinician ... Greta prepares a vaginal injection of acid for Abigail Phillips (Tania Busseller) "to calm your inexhaustible need for sex".

MAIN PICTURE: Juana (Lina Romay) subjects Abigail to scatological horrors in the clinic's latrine, while Carla (Peggy Markoff) observes unsympathetically.

BOTTOM L: Rego sees to it that bleeding heart liberal Dr. Milton Arcos (Jess Franco) disappears. BOTTOM R: Insurrection! The patients lose patience with the warden's wicked ways.





MAIN PICTURE: Dyanne Thorne as Ilsa (or Greta if you prefer) in Ilsa the Wicked Warden aka Greta – Haus Ohne Männer, using her favourite stoolie Juana (Lina Romay) as a human pin-cushion – just for fun.

SMALL PICTURE: Chief guard Lorli Bucher suppresses disobedience in the showers.

RIGHT: Juana prepares for a night of submission with the phenomenally endowed Greta.



secured a fair number of theatrical bookings, it was a bit of a dud compared to the first two films and conspicuously failed to keep the sleaze fires burning.

But wait – what about the *fourth* Ilsa film? The raunchy and offensive one by that crazy Spanish director? Well, here is where the story gets complicated. Although it's frequently believed that Jess Franco directed a fourth entry in the Ilsa series, this is not really true. The film we know today as *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* was not intended to bear the name 'Ilsa' at all. Franco and producer Erwin C. Dietrich conceived and released the film in Switzerland and Germany as *Greta – Haus ohne Männer* (literally, "Greta – house without men"), or in the French-speaking parts of Switzerland, *Greta le tortionnaire*. While it's true that the film stars Dyanne Thorne, and her persona as 'Greta' is pretty much identical to Ilsa, when Franco put the film together he created, at least nominally, a new character. Only when picked up for distribution in the USA did the association with the Ilsa films grow, and even then it's not as straightforward as is commonly assumed, having only really blossomed with the advent of videotape. (See 'Canadian and American releases' below.)

So *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* is not a true Ilsa film, but the tone is very similar, right down to the deliberately outrageous shock scenes. Needles stuck into breasts, erotic asphyxia, mutilation, flagellation; Franco delivers in spades the sort of sadosexual nastiness that Ilsa fans adore and detractors abhor. For *Ilsa She wolf of the SS*, director Don Edmonds had benefitted from the special make-up effects of Joe Blasco, who'd also created the groundbreaking fx for Cronenberg's *Shivers*. There was no one like Blasco to design special effects for *Greta – Haus ohne Männer*, so Franco (who never cared much for 'special effects anyway) simply amplified the sleaze factor, giving the audience a different kind of shudder while leaving no one short-changed. In the film's most infamous scene he delivers a coprophagic interlude so gloatingly nasty that it deserves pride of place in the exploitation hall of infamy. The scene involves new girl Abbie (who is fishing for information about her missing sister Rosa) being blackmailed into licking the ass of the queen bitch of the cell-block, Juana, played by Franco's muse Lina Romay. When Juana demands "*lick my culo*" immediately after we see her using the toilet (itself a rarity in such movies), nothing in the special effects toolkit could compete with the ensuing violation. Franco places in the mind of the viewer an image so intimate, so disgusting, that a prosthetic simulation would only diminish the effect (besides, back in the 1970s even the most gung-ho of spfx maestros would have had career doubts about spending four weeks sculpting a realistic shitty asshole). Acting and camera placement do everything one could ask to sell the scene, short of a visit to the furthest shores of scat porn. Lina Romay plays her character coldly, brilliantly, and one can only gasp at Franco's sheer nerve. Presaged by Juana's offhand remark to another prisoner as she sits on the toilet – "*With these trots I'd better not move*" – the scene vaults over the good taste barrier, and by the time Romay is ordering poor Abbie to "*Come on – lick my culo... don't you want to know about Rosa*

Phillips?" we're stunned by this brazen eruption of scatological sadism. Some will be disgusted, a very few turned on, while others, myself included, can only cheer from the sidelines as Franco once again demonstrates his commitment to every aspect of the perverse. The presence of Peggy Markoff's 'Carla' observing it all adds an extra tinge of humiliation, and her casual words of advice after the degradation ("*Stop crying! After all, she kept her word... You should try to forget what she's done*") refuse even to hint at moral outrage. Truly a scene De Sade himself would have loved!

There are two more sleaze highlights in this film, both of which have the entanglement of sex and violence at their core. The first involves Juana, who as well as being top dog among the prisoners is also the Warden's favourite snitch. She's fallen for one of the other inmates, but unfortunately for her it's someone whom Ilsa dislikes. Although Ilsa forbids it, Juana continues her flirtation, which leads to what is usually referred to as 'the human pin cushion scene'. Ilsa amuses herself by punishing Juana for her romantic indiscretions by shoving multiple needles into her breasts. The scene is a classic of its kind. Franco uses no music, just the breathing of the two women. The needles are never seen entering flesh, with the curve of Romay's breasts always obscuring the point of entry. The sequence nevertheless works because it allows us to imagine the details until, with a flourish, our imagination is ravished by Ilsa's final *coup de théâtre* – she clasps her victim tightly to her enormous bosom, which presses the needles deep into Juana's flesh. Wonderfully executed, nastily erotic, and played beautifully by Romay and Thorne, the scene is a masterclass in screen sadism. The second stand-out is the scene in which Ilsa suffocates a woman with a clear plastic bag, asphyxiating her while panting in sexual arousal and watching the stricken victim die. No special effects needed here; just good editing, good acting, and a will to be nasty. It may well be the most disturbing scene of all, because it's so simple and so pure in its evocation of Sadean enjoyment.

In case this sounds like a hideous endurance test, it's worth stressing that there's also a mile-wide streak of camp here. How could there not be, with Dyanne Thorne as your leading lady? *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* may shock you, but it's just as likely to make you giggle. Ms. Thorne is an icon of excess who seems as though she's sprung from some unholy (and *deeply* unlikely) bedroom alliance between John Waters and Tura Satana. The film is ultimately dominated by her over-the-top sense of fun. Beginning with shots of her enjoying a luxury bubblebath and soaping her prodigious breasts, there's an undercurrent of purring playfulness that only the humourless could miss. Of course, this simply adds to the disorientating weirdness of the film: one minute it's just a camp bit of fun, the next it's leeringly brutal and gross. Tonally the film is all over the place; at times, thanks to the music, we even stray into what feels like a corny adventure serial (shades of *Hogan's Heroes*, the TV series whose standing set the original Ilsa film borrowed). Such wrenching disparities are a hallmark of Franco's films in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see also *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties* and *La noche de los sexos abiertos*).

Ilsa the Wicked Warden was Franco's second Women-in-Prison film for Dietrich, and it differs significantly from the first, *Barbed Wire Dolls*. This time there's more of an attempt at contextualising the horrors, with a concerned doctor (played by Franco himself) who visits a human rights organisation in the hope of exposing Ilsa's horrific activities. Bearing in mind Dietrich's self-confessed dismay with the technical roughness of *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Greta – Haus ohne Männer* was evidently meant to be the 'deluxe' version: the internal dynamics of sex and sadism are present and correct, but they're 'dolled-up' with star presence, reasonably careful photography, traditional musical cues, and a framing device that locates the horror in a world beyond the confines of the prison. The script tries to ground the story in the real world of political and press corruption, and in doing so sets up a kind of cognitive dissonance between the amoral pleasures of witnessing sadism and the existence of a moral framework in the narrative. However, once the 'real world' has been acknowledged, the template is the same as before – the girls in the clinic include a cynical lesbian, a warden's favourite, a mad woman, an innocent newcomer, and Eric Falk as a brutal prison guard. Even the electroshock bed from *Barbed Wire Dolls* makes a comeback.

Another returning star from *Barbed Wire Dolls* is actress Peggy Markoff, who played the self-styled 'Queen' of the prison camp in the first film. Here she is again, in a similarly baroque and deranged role as Carla, whose backstory, related in a lengthy dialogue scene, really stands out for its imaginative excess... Carla used to be a man ("I wasn't always a girl, I had a very big cock!") but had a sex change, wishing to become 'normal' and settle down with a man. All did not go smoothly... ("After I changed sex I thought I could live a normal life, I even fell in love. This guy was everything I ever wanted. The one I hoped for. Ha! I had married a shitty pansy pederast queer! So then I planned my revenge, I cut off his balls!") Incarcerated as criminally insane, she has since discovered that she prefers women. ("When I was a man I preferred other men, now I prefer women... Men are so vulgar. Women are so loveable, passionate, sensitive..."). One can't help wishing that Franco had shot Carla's story and sold it as a prequel! After going to such extremes the film needs a good solid exploitation ending, and Franco delivers in spades. Ilsa is set upon and torn to pieces by her victims, led by Juana, whose conscience has finally been tweaked after seeing Abbie reunited with her sister Rosa, only to find poor Rosa has been driven hopelessly insane in a dingy torture cellar beneath the clinic. Franco cleverly intercuts shots of the prisoners chewing at Ilsa's flesh with shots of lions and tigers mauling their natural prey, suggesting the animalistic rage of womankind. The oppressed literally eat the oppressor alive, and to hell with the International Treaty on Human Rights. Meanwhile, in a last cynical twist, we see Eric Falk in his hidey-hole, merrily capturing Ilsa's grisly death-throes on film, for sale to the snuff-seeking client who's been buying recordings of the prisoners' sufferings throughout. Perhaps a paranoid misinterpretation of this final twist explains why Cinepix allegedly took against the film; according to Steve Swires, in an interview with Dyanne Thorne

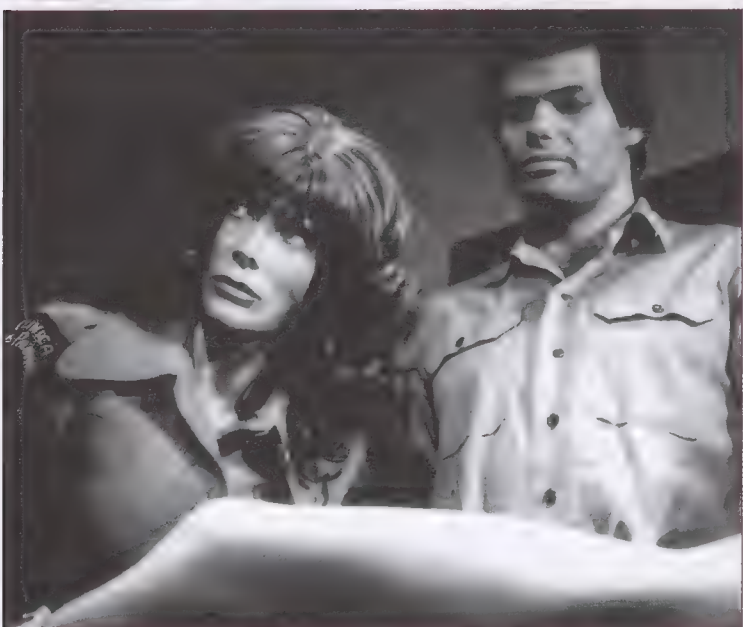
published in *Fangoria* spin-off magazine *Gorezone* in 1991, when Cinepix viewed the rushes they were "deeply offended by the results, terminating Thorne's contract in retaliation." Thorne went on to say: "Cinepix put me through hell because of Greta. It turned out that Franco had kept the camera rolling when he shouldn't have, and grabbed explicit nude shots of me without my knowledge. Cinepix thought I was aware of it and had encouraged it. After that, they had nothing more to do with me."³ One has to say the story sounds like hooey, even by movie standards! And of course despite any qualms they may have had, Cinepix released the film, theatrically and on video, and made a lot of money.

Ilsa the Wicked Warden is one of Franco's most outrageous films, offering a spectacle of sexual sadism so pungent, so over the top, that on release in the grindhouses of America in the late 1970s it left some audience members heaving. Others took delight in Franco's 'anything goes' excesses: according to writer and sleaze biographer Bill Landis, when the film played on New York's 42nd Street it received howls of approval from hard-to-please regulars cruising the city's sleazepits for the ultimate in screen shocks. It's a testament to Franco's unerring taste for transgression that the film is still capable of shocking viewers today.

Franco on screen: As the concerned Dr. Arcos, Franco is on the side of the angels this time... Offscreen, Franco enjoyed cordial relations with his visiting American superstar: asked on a DVD commentary if Franco was a tyrant on set, Thorne said, "He's a gentleman. He's too smart to be angry."⁴

Cast and crew: In many ways, this is as much of a 'star vehicle' for Dyanne Thorne as *Jack the Ripper* was for Klaus Kinski. The *Ilsa* films may not belong in the same artistic constellation as *Aguirre, Wrath of God*, but in her own way Dyanne Thorne was as much of a proven screen presence as Kinski who, let's not forget, spent most of the 1960s and early 1970s making films in then-despised genres like the spaghetti western and the giallo. With a larger-than-life personality and two of the biggest up-front scene-stealers in the business, Thorne was one of the first examples of what one might call 'Sleaze Royalty', along with such alternative megastars as Divine and Tura Satana. Mainstream coverage for her films was virtually nonexistent, but anyone who walked through Times Square between 1973 and 1982 probably saw her face on posters and front-of-house stills a thousand times. She enters so fully into the spirit of the film that it can be puzzling to read her in an interview claiming, "Naively, I did not understand that this was planned as a sexploitation film. Mr. Franco is a talented director with whom I had hoped we would create a film of some small significance with the depth of an expose. The joke was on me."⁵ If indeed she was tempted over to Europe with the promise of appearing in a searing political exposé, she has magnanimously opted to forgive the man responsible for the deception: moments later in the same interview she adds, "He [Franco] has a great sense of humor and remains high on my list of respected human beings – (even if a little 'kinky')."⁶

Music: Conventional orchestral scoring mixed with some latin numbers and a few stray cues from other Dietrich productions. The



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Behavioural therapy the Ilsa way ... Abigail (Tania Busselier) undergoes questioning ... Dr. Milton Arcos (Jess Franco), impotent in the face of fascist oppression, is forced to hand the horribly injured clinic escapee Rosa Phillips back to Ilsa ... Ilsa and Dr. Rego (Eric Falk), hard at work on Abigail ... Rosa (Angela Ritschard) undergoes electro-torture while being informed that her sister Abigail is now a prisoner too.



MAIN PICTURE: Jess Franco and director of photography Rudolf Küttel (hand on chin) discuss a scene with exploitation superstar Dyanne Thorne. BOTTOM LEFT: Italian locandina for the film. BOTTOM RIGHT: Franco (far left) and Küttel (behind the camera) set up a scene featuring Peggy Markoff (seated next to the camera): Lina Romay sits on the bed far right, and the unknown actress playing Prisoner #13 sits in the centre.

title song from *Downtown* plays on a juke-box in the scene where Eric Falk hands over torture Super-8 reels to a sleazy customer ... The curious synthesiser music during the electro-torture scene was previously used by Dietrich in his supernatural-themed porno *Der Teufel in Miss Jonas* (1974) to accompany appearances by a weird demonic monster (the Devil of the title was played by Herbert Fux, who reprised the role later the same year, in Franco's *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*).

Locations: Exteriors were filmed during August 1976 in Sintra, Portugal: this marked the first time Franco had been back to the area since 1974 when he'd shot parts of *Julietta 69* there. Location interiors were filmed at the brooding Villa Sonnenberg, perched on a hill at the edge of a forest on the outskirts of Zürich. Built in 1911 by the architect Friedrich Wilhelm Fissler, this 39-room mansion started life as an orphanage. Today it houses a music school for children aged 4-17, but for a week or two in August 1976 its labyrinthine network of empty rooms became the inner chambers of Ilsa's brutal private 'clinic', providing both the interior spaces for the prisoners and for Ilsa's private chambers. Its hallway, carefully redressed with lots of raffia screens and coconut matting, doubled as the café where Nestor trades his snuff films. More interior shots were collected as usual at the Dietrich studio, above the Restaurant Gasthof Neuhaus (now destroyed), in Rümlang near Zürich.

Canadian and American theatrical releases: *Greta – Haus ohne Männer* was first picked up for release in the English-speaking world by Canadian distributors Cinepix, who put it out in June 1977 as *Greta the Mad Butcher* on a double bill with Alain Payet's *Train spécial pour SS* (retitled *Love Train for SS*). A year later, on 16 October 1978, Cinepix registered the film with the US Library of Congress under a new title, *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*. However, it appears there were legal problems, probably stemming from the director of the first two *Ilsa* films, Don Edmonds, because as far as I can ascertain Franco's film never played theatrically in either Canada or the US under that title (it did however turn up on video as *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* and *Ilsa: Absolute Power* in the early-to-mid 1980s) ... In the USA the film was picked up by veteran film buyer Bernie Jaco and released as *Wanda the Wicked Warden*. Jaco had worked for many years at the New York based indie distributor Cambist Films Inc., who'd handled the American releases of the first two *Ilsa* films, but he left in March 1978 when Cambist, citing declining income from the sexexploitation circuits, began scaling down their interest in erotica. The first release date I've been able to trace for *Wanda the Wicked Warden* was in January 1979, after which it toured as the headline film of a nationwide triple bill, with *Ilsa She wolf of the SS* and *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks*.

Canadian and American VHS releases: Only on videotape did *Greta – Haus ohne Männer* finally see the light of day as *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*. Cinepix released it with that title on Canadian VHS in 1983; five years later the unimaginatively named American Video used the *Ilsa* title too, with virtually the same box art except for a splattery decal on the front cover containing a quote from 'Cinema Magazine': "For pure unadulterated wickedness, no screen

villain out-evils Ilsa." Anchor Bay released the film as *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* on video in July 2000, and the same went for the DVD a few years later. Since then, the film continues to be sold under the *Ilsa* title for English-speaking releases on DVD and Blu-ray.

Connections: The scene in which Greta/Ilsa is torn apart and eaten by her prisoners is reminiscent of a scene in *The Bloody Judge*, in which a vengeful Diana Lorys leads a similar assault on a sidekick of Judge Jeffreys responsible for the death and torture of many prisoners ... Aspects of Carla's backstory recall Samuel Fuller's *The Naked Kiss* (1964).

Other versions: Despite being retitled for the American market, there are no differences (apart from the lead's altered character name) between the original German-language version and the American. The version released theatrically as *Wanda the Wicked Warden* has never surfaced on any home entertainment format. There is no indication, however, that *Wanda the Wicked Warden* differed in content from *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*; it appears the name was the only thing that changed ... The French variant *Penitencier des femmes perverses* is not to be confused with another film of the same title starring Marilù Tolo and Martine Brochard (actually *Prigione di donne*, directed by Brunello Rondi in 1974).

LOVE LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN

(UK/US DVD/video cover title)

Switzerland/Germany, 1976

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Die Liebesbriefe einer Portugiesischen Nonne (SWI/WG)

Alternative titles

Jungfrauen in Teufels Hand (WG alt. theatrical)

Virgins in the Devil's Hand

Cartas de amor a una monja Portuguesa (SP theatrical)

Love letters to a Portuguese nun

Lettres d'amour d'une nonne Portugaise (BEL/FR theatrical)

Tuhansien Himojen Luostari (FIN theatrical/video)

The monastery of a thousand passions

Ljubavna pisma kaluderice (YUG theatrical)

Love letters of nuns

De Tusen Passionernas Kloster (SWE theatrical)

The monastery of a thousand passions

Confesiones prohibidas de una monja (ARG theatrical)

Forbidden confessions of a nun

Confessioni proibite di una monaca adolescente (IT theatrical) *Forbidden confessions of a teenage nun*

Love Letters of a Portugeuse Nun [sic] (Australian poster)

Minnebrieven van een Non (NL video) *Love letters of a nun* (POR video cover)

Production companies

Cinemec-Film (Berlin)
Zweite Filmproduktions KG
Ascot Film GMBH & Co

Theatrical distributors

Avis Filmverleih/Ascot Film (SWI/West Germany)
Blake Films (Australia)
World Sales
Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Timeline

Franco & Dietrich contract	06 January	1976
Shooting in Portugal	08–27 November	1976
German 18-cert 48938 issued	07 March	1977
Germany	10 March	1977
Naples	23 December	1977
Rome	04 August	1978
Seville	27 September	1978
Barcelona	02 October	1978
Murcia	02 October	1978
Madrid	10 January	1979*
UK – rejected by the BBFC	06 February	1979
Lisbon	15 November	1985

*The IMDb gives a Madrid release date of 12 August 1978. This is not borne out by scrutiny of the *ABC* cinema listings for that day.

Theatrical running time

West Germany 85m05s

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite 89m09s

director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as ‘Manfred Gregor’]. executive producer: **Max Dora**. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. production manager: **Edouard A. Stöckli** [as ‘Eduard A. Stöckli’]. location manager: **Davide Quintans**. editor: **Marie-Louise Buschke**. sound: **Hubertus Schmandtke**, **Klaus Kunsemüller**. dialogue: **Christine Lembach**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. A **Cinemec Zweite Filmproduktions KG**, **Ascot Film GmbH & Co** production released by **Avis-Filmverleih/Ascot**. world sales: **Elite Film AG** (Zürich). *Uncredited*: story: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. art director: **Davide Quintans**. stills: **Juan Soler Cózar**.

Cast: **Susan Hemingway** (Maria [Marie] Rosalea Coutinho). **William Berger** (Father Vincent). **Ana Zanatti** (Mother Alma, the Abbess and “Eminent Priestess”). **Herbert Fux** (Satan). **Aida Vargas** [as Aida Kargas] (Sister Joanna). **Vitor Mendes** (Mayor António Fernando Queiroz de Melo). **Herman José** [as ‘Hermann Krippahl’] (Prince Manuel [or Immanuel] Gonzalez).

José Viana (Monsignor Crespo, the Grand Inquisitor). **Patricia Da Silva** (Maria’s mother). *Uncredited*: **Aida Gouveia** [as ‘Isa Schneider’] (Sister Antonia). **Victor de Sousa** (Inquisitor’s assistant). **Nicolau Breyner** (the Prince’s chaperone). *OB adds*: Clara Marabuto (Josefina). Patricia Leal (Patricia). *MF adds*: Dagmar Bürger. Esther Studer. *Note*: Alain Petit’s *Jess Franco ou les prospérités du bis* states that Esther Studer is a torture victim in the film (presumably in the dream sequence or in the background of Maria’s waking torture scene). However, none of these women look like Studer to me. IMDb lists Anton Diffring as ‘Old Priest’. This is incorrect; Diffring is not in the film.

Synopsis: *Medieval Portugal. A young peasant girl called Maria Rosalea attracts the attention of a priest, Father Vincent, who spies her kissing her boyfriend in the woods. He drags her home, declares her a grievous sinner, swindles her mother out of her life savings, and takes her to the local convent on the pretence of saving her soul. However, the convent, run by Mother Alma, is actually a Satanic coven, with whom Father Vincent is in league. Maria becomes the focus of various sordid activities, including oral sex, mortification of the flesh, and eventually rape by Satan himself. She tries to escape the convent but is brought back to her tormentors by the Mayor. Maria writes a letter to her mother, begging to be removed from the convent, but it’s intercepted by one of the nuns. Her case is put before the Grand Inquisitor; Father Vincent and Mother Alma convince him that Maria is a liar and a heretic. After being stripped, beaten and tortured, Maria is declared a witch and sentenced to burn at the stake. On the eve of her destruction she writes a letter to God proclaiming her faith and throws it from the window of her cell. It’s picked up by a passing nobleman – but will he do anything to help?*

Production notes: In June 1976, Franco discussed his career and future plans with a journalist from *Vampir* magazine: “In Spain, I’d love to film *Fuenteovejuna* by [Spanish playwright] Lope de Vega. It’s the story of a crime committed by an entire village. I want to tell this story in an old village in Castile, which I know very well from the time I was working with Orson Welles as second unit director. It’s a charming village in the north of the country, where the most modern house was built in the year 1000. The inhabitants live almost exactly as they would have done at that time. In this medieval setting, I would like to film this story, which plays out in today’s world.”¹ The story to which Franco refers would certainly have made for powerful drama. *Fuenteovejuna* was first published in 1619, based upon an atrocity that took place in the village of the same name in 1476. Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, head of a Papally endorsed militia called the Order of Calatrava, cruelly mistreated the villagers, who banded together and killed him. When a magistrate sent by King Ferdinand II of Aragon arrived to investigate, he proceeded to torture men, women and young boys on the rack, but gave up when those put to torture responded only by saying ‘Fuenteovejuna did it.’ Had Franco filmed the story, it could have been the Dietrich-era equivalent of *The Bloody Judge*, with an anti-authoritarian/anti-clerical theme, a rich historical background, and – of course – lashings of rape

and torture. Instead, Franco poured his fascination with Catholic injustice into a different project, suggested to him by Erwin Dietrich: *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*...

Review: This is, superficially at least, one of Jess Franco's 'classiest' pictures, with a thoughtful script, sober camerawork, hordes of extras in period dress, and a suitably 18th century inflected score. Underneath the trappings, however, it's as perverse and twisted as ever. Poker-faced sobriety and studied elegance frame a mordantly satirical, almost Buñuelian attack on Catholicism, elaborated for the most part with clarity and concision. In production terms we're a long way from the shoddiness of recent throwaways like *Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln*. Instead, like *Jack the Ripper*, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* shows what Franco is capable of when he's given some decent money and the chance to take a little time on a project. But while improved financing is certainly a factor in ensuring that *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* looks so beautiful, it's not just money that distinguishes this movie; it also seems that Franco gave it his full attention. The framing and composition is exquisite, and Baumgartner's lighting rises to the occasion too, vindicating Dietrich's decision to team him up with Franco. Baumgartner's professionalism can sometimes veer towards the merely conventional, but there are shots in this film that would not disgrace John Alcott or Vilmos Zsigmond. So was the increased effort and focus down to Franco's passion for the project? Or was it due to Dietrich's hawk-like monitoring of exactly *what* the director was getting up to on location? After the troublesome events of 1975, from thereon Dietrich despatched a trusted observer to monitor Franco's location shooting, and it's striking that for the remainder of Franco's tenure with Elite Film there were no more 'back pocket' films, no unfinished works or 'Manacoa' productions, and thus no division of the director's attention.

So yes, absolutely, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* is a well-rounded production, beautifully executed, and worthy of high praise. I only hesitate because when it comes to 'naughty nuns' engaging in salacious blasphemy I have to confess they leave me colder than a witch's tit. I understand that for Catholics, seeing two 'brides of Christ' snogging a crucifix probably packs quite a punch, but for me the symbols just get in the way, like a mouthful of balsa when you're trying to lick someone's tonsils. Much of the reputation of this film lies with its irreligious acts and images, so although I applaud Franco's commitment to portraying the hypocrisies of the medieval Church, it's a film that I admire more than enjoy. Fortunately, what does stir my blood is cruelty, of which there is much here, just enough in fact to keep me occupied until 'here endeth the lesson'. I'm also fond of fantastical monsters, and clearly Franco is too – what other explanation could there be for having a text-book Satan turn up half-way through the film to rape the heroine at a Black Mass, dressed in red stretch-fabric and chuckling cartoonishly, with a penis jutting from his forehead? This personal appearance by Lucifer comes whizzing out of left field – there's no supernatural element elsewhere, no sense that the

world of devils and angels has any bearing on reality. The thrust of the story is to do with the foolishness of religion and the hypocrisy of Catholic tradition, with its sadomasochistic mortification of the flesh posturing as abstinence from desire. This manifestation of the Devil stands out like a metaphysical sore thumb, as comical and illogical as the phallic appendage on his bonce: we are left to assume he's either real (various nuns look on in amazement when he appears) or else a figment of Maria's tormented imagination, a demon summoned up in her mind's eye as she's raped by someone posing as the Devil, while all around her collude in the deception.

The brutalised innocent at the centre of this web of infamy, poor tormented Maria, is a paragon of piety and foolish virtue. It's interesting that although this is not one of Franco's 'official' Sade adaptations, in respect of the character of Maria the film is closer than usual to the spirit of the Marquis. When first quizzed by the monstrous Father Vincent (William Berger in a stand-out performance), she refutes her quick-thinking boyfriend's lie that they are soon to be married. Instead of employing a useful falsehood, she cleaves to the truth and so assists in her own downfall. It's a pleasingly Sadean notion that the virtue of honesty brings about the heroine's ruination. Later, during a lesbian seduction involving the eating of an apple, Maria is caught in flagrante by Mother Alma (Ana Zanatti, another of the film's major assets), with a heavily incriminating mouthful of Satan's fruit still gripped between her teeth. It's a subtle and amusing visualisation of 'sin' that balances some of the more literal-minded moments elsewhere (*"Satan triumphs, God is hopeless!"* says a passing nun to her friend, like schoolgirls playing top-trumps with metaphysical deities). Such comedy at the expense of Catholicism leavens what is otherwise Franco's most unambiguous attack on organised religion and its fool's mirror, Satanism. Father Vincent and Mother Alma continue to extol harsh Catholic values despite their Satanic 'leanings', the better to enjoy the suffering of innocents. Throughout the film, the Satanic fallacy is given a thorough bashing: despite being nominally opposed to Christian beliefs, the Satan trip involves just as much guilt and pain and self-torture as the palaver dreamed up by Catholic teaching. Freedom from sin doesn't get a look-in; the adherents are swapping one tyrannical torturer for another.

Amid this epic foolishness, only total cynics like Father Vincent are truly free. A selfish bastard who's in it purely for gratification, naturally he gives not a fig for liberation. As long as there are piously sobbing teenage girls to ravish, he's happy. His sidekick Mother Alma is more ensnared within a belief-system; she's not a cynic but a corrupted believer, sincere in her twisted subservience to an inverted deity. (On the subject of inversion, it always amazes me that Satanists seem to *love* the decor of Catholicism, that the loathed symbols of the enemy should be kept in place with only simple inversion to separate them from the originals. It's a bit like professing a hatred of homosexuals and then decorating your house with upside down gay porn!) Upholstering the whole affair with Walter Baumgartner's skilfully pastiched cod-religious classical music, Franco relishes the ironies as Alma inserts a burning

poultice into her vagina, imploring Satan both to accept her 'baby' and relieve her of the pain, while simultaneously fingering her erect nipples. The entanglement of guilt, pain, pleasure, sin and punishment, and the delirious sliding between them, embodies the religious obsession with desire as the work of the Devil. Desire is always more powerful than attempts to suppress it, and simply emerges elsewhere in twisted forms. In this case it attaches to Satan as the symbolic personification of wickedness, so that he becomes not just the symbol of evil, but the most powerfully exciting erotic seducer (Franco misses a trick, however, by casting the very peculiar Herbert Fux as the Devil, instead of a more handsome satyr). As a visualisation of the way Catholicism generates monsters, the film is bang on the money: just don't ask me how the demon of lust in the film crosses the line between symbolism and physical reality, because I haven't the foggiest, and I doubt whether Franco could have delivered a convincing exegesis either!

Susan Hemingway, who racked up seven performances for Franco between this and *Voces de muerte* (1983), makes an immediate splash as the virginal naif around whom lecherous religious lunatics gather like horny hyenas. She perfectly conveys the character's uncomprehending innocence, foolish stubbornness, and masochistic acceptance of suffering, bringing to the screen the qualities Franco had been praying for when making *Justine* a decade before. Controversially, it turns out that she was, as they say, 'barely legal' at the time of shooting: as a result, the film was banned for theatrical release in the UK, and cut for DVD release. Hemingway is stripped, tied up and tortured on the rack, and in the pièce-de-résistance receives the aforementioned red-suited devil into her 'rear sanctum': this is conveyed, however, through camera placement and suggestion, *not* porno close-ups! Contemporary laws in Spain, Germany, Switzerland and Portugal (I think that covers it) were not transgressed, so Franco wasn't doing anything wrong, but it's an eye-opener for viewers in English-speaking countries, where actresses like Susan George were considered jailbait at twenty, and tame films like Norman Thaddeus Vane's *Twinky* (1970) were pushing the boundaries. In one especially transgressive moment, Maria dreams of being compelled to orally service her older cousin, a scene which ends for the briefest of flash-frames with a splash of 'stage semen' across her face. That this dream occurs as Maria sleeps fitfully, with the thorns of penance wrapped around her bare torso, stresses once again that the Catholic obsession with mortification of the flesh pushes desire into taking whatever route it can to find expression. The film bats away any possible accusation of gratuitousness by virtue of its rigorous attack on the Christian mind-set's distortion of eroticism. Its adroit combination of lascivious detail and anti-clerical rhetoric makes this one of Franco's most impressive and coherent dramas.

Cast and crew: More than any other Franco film of the period, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* is blessed with fantastic central performances. William Berger is truly extraordinary as the rotten and rapacious Father Vincent, lending the film a dangerous, malevolent

edge while also smuggling a twisted sense of fun into the mix. Such a role is a gift to the right actor, and Berger is having a blast playing this loathsome man. His blasé manipulation of Maria's mother, his corrupt masturbatory behaviour in the confessional box, and his ruthless self-interest as he forces the quivering Maria to perform oral sex, make Father Vincent one of the most pungently wicked and memorable characters in Franco's cinema. Berger, already a Franco veteran after *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* and *Night of the Assassins*, would go on to lend his inimitable screen magnetism to a marvellous late bloom in Franco's career, *Juego sucio a Casablanca* (1984) ... This film marks the debut of a very pretty Angolan starlet called Susan Hemingway (not her real name), who had just turned sixteen as filming commenced. In a German magazine from the late 1970s, Dietrich's regular production manager Werner Zeindler recalled that, "*Susan's father was obsessed with the idea of turning the barely 16-year-old into an international star*".² Susan, however, was not so keen on the idea and left her angry father behind in Lisbon, choosing her own projects and hooking up with Franco instead. After making six films for him, all of them shot in Portugal, she left the film industry, having found herself a Brazilian multi-millionaire husband ... The rest of the cast were drawn chiefly from TV and theatre rather than cinema ... The film marks the beginning of Franco's long association with cameraman and stills photographer Juan Soler, who was born 24 March 1953 in Porto, Portugal, the son of Catalan parents. I asked him how he became interested in photography, and when he first met Franco: "*The first step came when I was a child, because of my father's passion for photography. I started playing with 6X9 bellows cameras, which he had. The second step was to set up a laboratory at home to develop my photos. From there, my friend who was studying with me, Ángel Ordiales, was crazy about movies: he worked part-time in some studios in Lisbon and he then addicted me! I abandoned my supposed study of history at the University of Barcelona to a cinema and photography course in Lisbon, where I continued living. I left the film school because I was hired to work as an assistant director at Tele Cine Moro, the large studios in Lisbon who made advertisements, documentaries, etc. Three months later, I was shooting commercials, replacing my director. Anyway, as I hated promotional films, I left my job and traveled through Central America, without money and with two Nikon F cameras, trying to do photo reports. A year later I was in Lisbon, directing commercials again, and a series of programs for RTP (Radio Televisión Portuguesa). I traveled again to Paris, trying to study cinema at the IDHEC. As I did not get into school, I ended up traveling around Europe and having fun, making money playing guitar in bars. I took pictures for a Swedish magazine, where I lived for six months. On returning home to Lisbon, I was called to work on a film, as a stills photographer. I accepted. It was Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun, directed by Jesús Franco. I think we met in a lounge of the Ritz Hotel in Lisbon, where the team was staying. I was hired through a Portuguese production manager, Vítor Costa. I met Jesús and we left immediately for the set, which was in Cascais. From that moment I began to work with him frequently.*" ... It's interesting to note that a Portuguese ballet called *O Bombo da Festa*, mounted in Lisbon in October 1976,

Innocent Maria (Susan Hemingway), victim of a nefarious priest,
is declared a witch and sentenced to be burned at the stake
in *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*.

cinema

*Cartas de amor
a una monja*

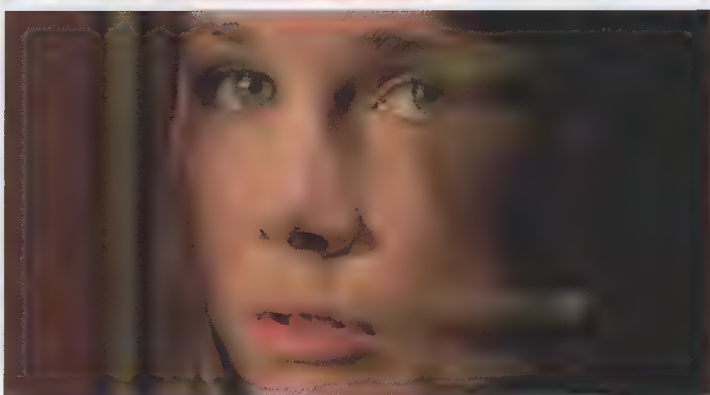
portuguesa

SUSAN HEMINGWAY WILLIAM BERGER

HERBERT FUJISA SCHNEIDER DAGMAR BURGER

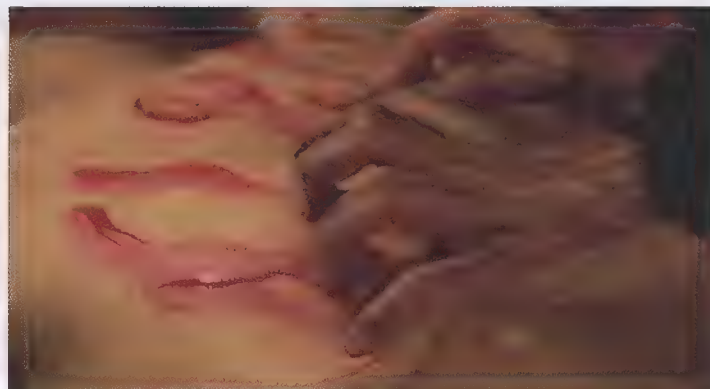
JESS FRANCO





TOP: Father Vincent (William Berger), amoral agent of an innocent girl's misery, finds perfect cover for his proclivities in the Catholic Church.
MIDDLE: Mother Alma and Father Vincent (middle) resist handing over Maria to the king's representatives.
BOTTOM: Mother Alma and Father Vincent, Sadean libertines and political players, furthering their interests.

FROM THE TOP: Father Vincent enjoys the humiliating confessions of Maria, who has fallen asleep and dreamed of performing oral sex on a boy. He informs her that her penance will be to perform the same act upon him. Vincent surveys the innocent who has inflamed his passions. Maria, the eternal victim à la Sade's Justine, ensnared by the wicked Father Vincent.



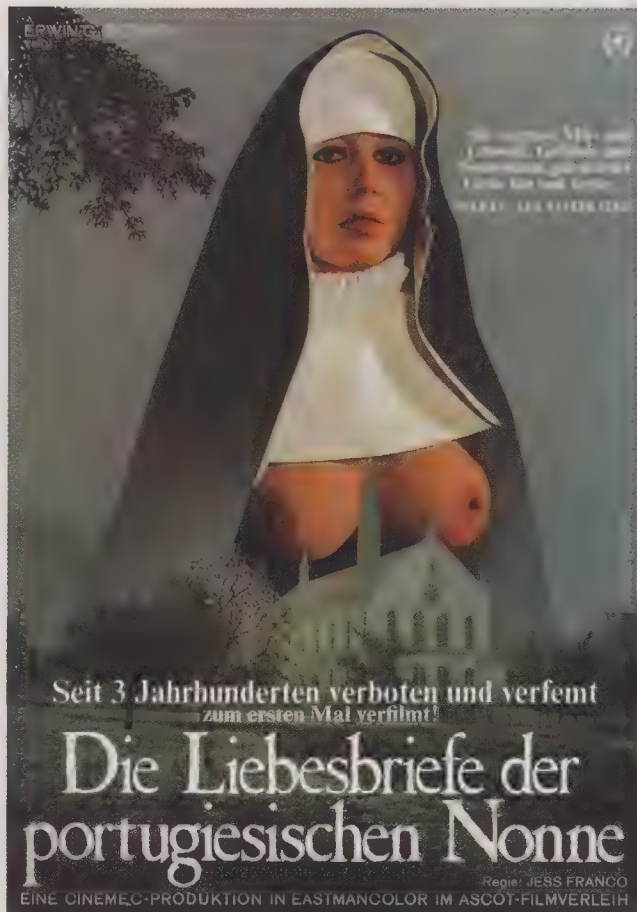
FROM THE TOP: Maria tries to sleep, wearing thorns of mortification. Father Vincent runs to the convent (actually the sea-facing side of the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace in Cascais, Portugal, as seen previously in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*). Maria is flagellated during a black mass. Witches venerate Satan in the robes of the Sisterhood.

FROM THE TOP: The Devil gets his hands on the crux of the matter ... Satanic nuns raise the Devil in the bowels of the convent ... Sister Joanna (Aida Vargas) is treated just as badly as innocent young Maria, but because she's older, and a trollop, she doesn't get much attention in the story... Father Vincent and Mother Alma flee the King's men, a scene shot inside the main aisle of Lisbon Cathedral (also known as the Sé).

ERWIN C. DIETRICH

Die Liebesbriefe einer portugiesischen Nonne

SUSAN HEMINGWAY
William BERGER - Herbert FUX
Regie: JESS FRANCO



DIE LIEBESBRIEFE DER PORTUGIESISCHEN NONNE

Seit drei Jahrhunderten wurden die Liebesbriefe der portugiesischen Nonne als Privatdrucke in alle Weltssprachen übersetzt, jedoch nie die Originalfassung verwendet, welche die Nonne Maria Alcoforado 1669 schrieb und die zum Teil Vorlage für die Geschichte der O bildete J. Franco (DIE NONNE VON CLICHY) führt Regie, Erwin C. Dietrich (DIE NICHTEN DER FRAU OBERST) produziert
Regie: Jess Franco



TOP: Rejected artwork, submitted to the German censor in 1977.
BOTTOM: Floundered with Satan: Jess and Lina with Herbert Fux (left) at the Hamburg Film Festival in 2001, photograph by Uwe Huber

TOP: Rarely seen, uncensored version of this striking promotional artwork for the film
BOTTOM: Prince Manuel Gonzalez (Herman José, right) reads Maria's desperate letter, as his chaperone (Nicolau Breyner) looks on

featured among the actors, Herman José and Aida Gouveia; and among the dancers, Clara Marabuto and Aida Vargas. That's four members of the cast of *Portuguese Nun*, all working together in a stage production made around the same time!

Music: Walter Baumgartner excels here with some lavish orchestral string arrangements. The ironic grandeur of his mock-liturgical title music is particularly memorable.

Locations: *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* may be short on actual love letters (a letter to mum and a letter to God being all that Maria actually pens), but the film itself is a love letter of sorts; to Portugal, to Portuguese architecture, and in particular to Franco's favourite architectural location, the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães, in Cascais. Several scenes were shot in Lisbon Cathedral.

UK theatrical release: Rejected by the BBFC on 6 February 1979. Cut by 6m15s for its Anchor Bay DVD release in 2004.

Connections: *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* borrows its title from *Les Lettres Portugaises*, first published anonymously in Paris in 1669. Though widely regarded as a work of epistolary fiction, written by the 17th century Count of Guilleragues, Gabriel-Joseph de La Vergne, the letters are thought by some to be genuine, written by a real life Portuguese nun called Mariana Alcoforado. Whatever the correct authorial attribution, Franco's film, as usual, has precious little to do with its declared literary source, and instead reconvenes and polishes ideas from De Sade, chiefly elements of *Justine*, with a concentrated hostility to the Catholic Church that the Marquis would have embraced wholeheartedly ... Although the historical veracity of the source is in question, Franco has taken the trouble to tie in the action with the life of the heroic Infante (Prince) Manuel, Count of Ourém (or Prince Manuel Gonzalez as he's called in the English dub), an adventurer, swordsman and progressive friend of the arts who was alive at the time of Mariana Alcoforado ... The unexpected appearance of the Devil echoes a similar moment in Franco's *The Demons* in 1972, creating a similarly confusing conceptual effect!

BLUE RITA

(English-language DVD title)

Switzerland & France, 1977

French visa no: 47406

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Das Frauenhaus (SWI/WG) *House of Women*

Blue Rita (FR theatrical/BEL theatrical poster)

Alternative titles

Le cabaret des filles perverses (BEL French-language theatrical) *Cabaret of Perverted Girls*

Μπλου Ρίτα: Το Καμπαρέ των Διεστραμμένων(GRE DVD)

Blue Rita: The Cabaret of Perverts

Blue Rita – le cabaret des filles perverses (FR press flyer)

The Men's Trap at Paris (1978 trade title reported in *Variety*)

Claire... dove scivola scivola (IT theatrical)

Claire... where it's slippery slippery

Claire lingua viva (IT alt. theatrical) *Claire Living Tongue*

Production companies

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

Avis Filmverleih (SWI/West Germany)

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Victoria Films (Belgium)

Timeline

Shooting date	early	1977
German 18-cert 49204 issued	23 June	1977
Germany	08 July	1977
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	17 October	1977
French visa issued	24 November	1977
Paris	30 November	1977
Zürich	October	1978
Rome (as <i>Claire lingua viva</i>)	08 May	1984
Rome (as <i>Claire... dove scivola scivola</i>)	25 May	1984
Turin (as <i>Claire lingua viva</i>)	22 August	1984
Turin (as <i>Claire... dove scivola scivola</i>)	23 November	1984

Theatrical running times

Switzerland	72m
Germany	75m11s
France	78m (Bier: 72m)
Paris*	95m (Pariscopes)

*This longer version may have included hardcore inserts.

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	78m29s
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director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. director of photography: **Rudolf Küttel**. production manager: **Werner Zeindler**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. costumes: **Ellen Salzmann**. make-up: **Jacob Peyer**. titles: **Studio Bartoschek**. An **Elite Film** Production. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: French co-producer: **Robert De Nesle**.

Cast: **Martine Fléty** (Rita). **Sarah Strasberg** (Princessa). **Dagmar Bürger** (ENG: Sam/GER: Sun). **Pamela Stanford** (Gina). **Esther Moser** (Rita's short-haired henchwoman). **Eric Falk** (Janusz Lassard/Janos Lazare aka Colonel Lazar, Western

European Chief of the CPPU). *Uncredited*: **Vicky Mesmin** [aka Chantal Virapin] (Moira). **Olivier Mathot** (Rolf Sebesky). **Henri Guégan** aka **Philippe Guégan** (Inspector Tanner). **Guy Delorme** (Mr. Bergen aka Kozinsky). **Angela Ritschard** (Rita's long-haired henchwoman). **Roman Huber** (gunman in cream trenchcoat). *Swiss pressbook adds*: **Néné Kaô**.

Notes: Alain Petit lists 'Betty Laure' as Sun and 'Lucien Tenarg' as Inspector Tanner. Neither of these names turn up anywhere else. The roles in question are actually played by Dagmar Bürger and Henri Guégan, so perhaps 'Betty Laure' and 'Lucien Tenarg' are pseudonyms found on video sleeves or promotional artwork? Similarly, Christophe Bier lists a mystery cast member called 'Karine Martin'; this appears to have been a pseudonym for Martine Fléty.

Synopsis: Rita (aka 'Blue Rita') runs a nightclub where sexy women perform onstage. She also runs a torture-and-extortion racket, capturing men and subjecting them to a love potion that makes them so uncontrollably horny they'll divulge anything. Rita orders the killing of a prostitute who tries to escape the club, then decides a new girl is required to replace her. She hires Sam, a pretty young girl, and gives her the task of extorting money from a handsome Russian boxer whom Rita has kidnapped and imprisoned. However, Rita's nefarious private world is about to be breached: a key employee is an undercover agent, and the victims are not always what they seem either...

Production notes: Did Jess Franco take a Christmas vacation in Paris at the end of 1976? If so perhaps he bumped into a few old confrères while strolling down the Champs Élysées, because *Blue Rita*, his first film of 1977, was a co-production between Erwin Dietrich's Elite Film and Franco's erstwhile Parisian producer, Robert De Nesle (aka Comptoir Français du Film Production). Such an alliance was a one-off for Dietrich, who hardly ever allied himself with other producers, having amassed enough money to fund his films without the need of co-production partners. Nevertheless, *Blue Rita* was shot on location in Paris, drew upon a number of French actors (including Eurociné regular Olivier Mathot), and was at least in some sense a Swiss-French co-production (although the Swiss/German version available on Blu-ray and DVD does not mention CFFP at all). Curiously, the French CNC Archives show *Blue Rita* as a 100% French production, with De Nesle cited as sole producer. Somebody somewhere was twisting the facts to benefit from international co-production regulations...

Meanwhile, Franco was back in legal trouble, this time with German producer Artur Brauner and his long-established company CCC Filmkunst. On 3 February 1977 Franco was served papers relating to three films he had made for Brauner in 1970: *Vampyros Lesbos*, *The Devil Came from Akasava* and *She Killed in Ecstasy*. The company demanded 11,880 Swiss francs (about £16,500 in today's money) plus 6% interest since April 21, 1971, along with a further sum of 11,841 Swiss francs...¹

Review: This is one of Franco's more audience-friendly sex dramas, and if your personal taste in interior design runs to 1970s 'kitsch-moderne' then it's a veritable smorgasbord of visual pleasure. An early scene has Eurociné regular Olivier Mathot and sultry black actress Vicky Mesmin making out in an all-white room, on an inflatable bed made from transparent plastic, surrounded by matching chairs and lounge. When transparent plastic funnels descend from the ceiling emitting sedative fumes, and the gas-masked lackeys of 'Blue Rita' carry the unconscious victim away for interrogation, we're looking at a sort of cut-price echo of the camp spy stories popular in the 1960s, such as *Danger: Diabolik* and *Modesty Blaise* (and more especially, Franco's late 1960s effort *The Girl from Rio*). A delicious early scene has Chantal Virapin, clad only in a dark blue cape, running down a Parisian backstreet before being run over by a car driven by Pamela Stanford, who's wearing a silver catsuit straight out of *Barbarella*. From the opening sequence, in which red and blue oil-lamps bathe pole-dancing girls in primary colours while a rip-off of 'Green Onions' plays on the soundtrack, *Blue Rita* tickles the senses so efficiently that it's half an hour before one realises that the story has gone precisely nowhere. Rather as Rita's interrogation techniques withhold sex from her desperately horny victims, the film itself withholds detail and intricacy until the final ten minutes, before exploding in a welter of double crosses and absurd twists. Having being lulled into a laid-back haze by the middle-of-the-road jazz score and sedate strip-club numbers, we're suddenly struggling to keep up. Careful watching reveals that the plot twists are both ridiculous and inconsistent, so ultimately if you don't follow what's going on you're not really 'missing the point' – it would seem that Franco simply found it amusing to conclude this tale in a flurry of manic plotting, with almost everyone revealed as playing a double game. Rita's club, it transpires, is awash with members of Interpol and the Russian Secret Service, all busily pulling a fast one on each other while checking out Rita's sexual interrogation techniques for possible State-sanctioned use.

For regular Franco watchers the film offers many pleasures. Stanford is always a welcome presence, here setting up tortures and then finding herself on the receiving end after being dropped in the shit by a colleague, while Delorme is suave and sinister as her associate Bergen, who feeds victims into Rita's sex-torture web according to his own malign agenda. Meanwhile, fans of that handsome hunk of the Dietrich stud ranch, Eric Falk, will get a kick out of his turn as a Russian boxer; he's captured and sexually tortured by Rita, but turns out to have a few tricks of his own held in reserve. The torture scenes are lots of fun, both for their intentionally camp elements (strong women preying on helplessly horny males, with lines such as "*I have ways of making a lecherous old bastard like you so horny you'll think your balls are about to burst!*"), and the unintentional hilarity of the English translation – take Olivier Mathot's imprisoned journalist, for instance, who maintains gentlemanly euphemisms even as his blood boils ("*I'm going crazy! I want to sleep with you!*"). There are decorative images



TOP L: Rita with one of her prisoners. TOP R: Having drugged her latest client (Olivier Mathot), unwilling hooker Moira (Chantal Virapin) gets ready to make a run for it. BOTTOM: Eastern European boxer Janusz Lassard (Eric Falk) is seduced into Rita's blackmail pit by the lovely Sam (Dagmar Bürger).



LOCKVOGEL FRAU —
KÖDER SEX —
OBJEKT MANN
**DAS FRAUEN-
HAUS**



LOCKVOGEL FRAU —
KÖDER SEX —
OBJEKT MANN
**DAS FRAUEN-
HAUS**



LOCKVOGEL FRAU —
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**DAS FRAUEN-
HAUS**



LOCKVOGEL FRAU —
KÖDER SEX —
OBJEKT MANN
**DAS FRAUEN-
HAUS**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Gina (Pamela Stanford) hunts down Moira (Chantal Virapin)... Bergen (Guy Delorme) and Gina plot their next move... Rita's second-in-command, Princessa (Sarah Strasberg, left), has Sam (Dagmar Bürger) taken away by two guards (Esther Moser, left, and Angela Ritschard, right)... Sam swears eternal allegiance to Rita in a ceremony conducted by Princessa... Suspiciously wealthy journalist Rolf Sebesky (Olivier Mathot) is captured by Rita's blackmail organisation... Gina's duplicity lands her in deep trouble

filmed with tongue-in-cheek artiness, and a preponderance of dramatic low angles recalling pornographic comic-strips (shots of Rita standing on top of the glass cage, for instance, allowing us a view of her vagina as she towers above the camera).

Yet for all the fun, we stay resolutely 'outside the frame'; nothing quite draws us into that charmed space where Franco's best films spin their mesmeric voodoo. Despite its visual allure *Blue Rita* is second-string Franco; mainly, I think, because it's devoid of his penchant for improvisation. As with many of the Dietrich-era films, the camerawork is accomplished, professional, but slightly conventional, with Franco apparently unable to wrest control. The fluid, probing, obsessively shifting camerawork that he brings to his best films is a vital component of his mature style, allowing him to shoot essentially plotless stories while magically holding our attention. Rita's sexual torture of male captives could have been filmed in such a way as to send us spiralling into that dazed erotic reverie Franco does so well. Instead, the camera remains rooted to the spot much of the time, only zooming very slowly or panning a little to incorporate movement. But let's not criticise too harshly; this is, after all, a light and frothy affair, never intended to plumb the darker reaches. With its green 'aphrodisiac potion' poured over naked men, its spiteful lesbian dominatrices, the gold-spiked cages with descending ceilings, swirling narcotic vapours, coloured lights atop sci-fi gadgetry and nude women in gas masks, the whole affair is an amusing romp through fetish-comic imagery. If it stays just a step away from true delirium it remains a trip well worth taking.

Cast and crew: The weakest link in the film, cast-wise, is top-billed Martine Fléty, who delivers an inexpressive performance as Rita. Given that Franco was hot off the set of *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, starring the leeringly expressive Dyanne Thorne, he must have found working with Fléty a bit of a comedown; she can barely muster a sneer during her dominatrix scenes, so thank goodness for the low angled camera shots, which do all the work on her behalf! After making her debut in the sex-horror flick *Draguse ou le manoir infernal* (1975) for porno director and sometime paperback scribe Patrice Rhomm, Fléty divided her time between Franco (*Blue Rita*, *Elles font tout* and *Je brûle de partout*), and Alain Payet, for whom she appeared in six hardcores: *Cocktail porno* (1977), *Bangkok porno* (1977), *Annonces spéciales pour couples vicieux* (1978), *Véronique nique nique* (1978), *Jouissances garanties* (1978), and *Sophie aime les sucettes* (1978).

Music: We're back in the realm of the pleasant but faintly fusty mainstream jazz favoured by the Dietrich productions, although there are a handful of better cues here, including a great Pink Floydish workout for organ and percussion during the first sex scene, the aforementioned Booker T rip-off (recycled from Erwin Dietrich's 1975 sex film *Mädchen ohne Männer*), and a reprise of the haunting Indian-flavoured music from the *Avengers* episode 'Honey For the Prince', already used in *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*: here it plays over a risqué sex show in which one of Rita's henchwomen has oral sex with the trunk of Ganesh, a mask of whose face is placed like a codpiece over a woman's crotch!

Locations: Location work was divided between Zürich (the safe-house scenes were filmed at the Villa Sonnenberg) and Paris. Pamela Stanford and Guy Delorme meet on the Pont de Bir-Hakeim, adjacent to the Eiffel Tower. It's interesting to note that this is one of the very few land-locked Franco films. Like *Exorcism* three years earlier, *Blue Rita* features no ocean views: instead, it is set beside the Seine.

Connections: *Blue Rita* sees Franco returning to the theme of a strip joint as front for criminal extortion, previously explored in *Les Ébranlées*, whilst also revisiting a theme from the far more disturbing *Shining Sex* – hellishly uncontrollable lust induced by a substance smeared on the flesh. Here, however, the notion is played for camp laughs rather than erotic horror ... Pamela Stanford and Guy Delorme are reunited after their prior association in *Lorna... the Exorcist* ... At one point Stanford wears what looks suspiciously like Soledad Miranda's red cape and trouser-suit from *Eugenie* (1970) ... A sexual clinch filmed through a fish-tank, with goldfish flitting lazily across the screen in soft-focus, is borrowed from *Succubus* ... the plot notion of the club being positively overrun with secret agents recalls the similarly spy-riddled Coliseum sequence in *Lucky the Inscrutable*...

French theatrical release: *Blue Rita* played in Paris for two weeks from 30 November 1977, amassing modest tickets sales of 6176.

Other versions: There is apparently an alternative French version of the film, called *Blue Rita*, incorporating hardcore scenes with two additional actors.

SATANIC SISTERS

(export title)

Switzerland, 1977

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Die Teuflischen Schwestern (SWI/WG) *The Diabolical Sisters*

Alternative titles

Swedish Nympho Slaves (UK theatrical)

Aberraciones sexuales de una rubia caliente (SP theatrical)

Sexual Aberrations of a Hot Blonde

Frenesie erotiche di una ninfomane (IT theatrical)

Erotic Frenzy of a Nymphomaniac

Les 2 soeurs vicieuses (FR theatrical) *2 Vicious Sisters*

Deux Soeurs Vicieuses (FR theatrical – provincial)

Sexy Sisters (US/UK DVD title)

2 Soeurs vicieuses (FR video)

De Wellustige Gezusters (NL video) *Randy Sisters*

The Diabolical Sisters (1978 trade title reported in *Variety*)

Deux soeurs vicieuses (Ton diable dans mon enfer)

(*Analyse des Films* review) *Two Vicious Sisters (Your Devil in My Hell)*

*Production company***Elite Film AG** (Zürich)*Theatrical distributor***Avis Filmverleih** (SWI/West Germany)**Jay Jay Films Ltd.** (London)*Timeline*

Shooting date	early	1977
German 18-cert 49339 issued	01 September	1977
Germany	02 September	1977
Zürich	February	1978
Italian censor n.7230 issued	25 January	1979
Turin	05 March	1979
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	23 July	1979
Paris (as <i>Les 2 soeurs vicieuses</i>)	19 September	1979
Rome	23 May	1980
UK 'X' cert issued	01 October	1980
London (as <i>Swedish Nympho Slaves</i>)	17 October	1980
Rouen (France) (as <i>Deux soeurs vicieuses</i>)	20 May	1981
Seville	02 November	1981
Barcelona	07 December	1981
Madrid	15 February	1982
Murcia	19 June	1982

Theatrical running time

Switzerland	84m
Germany	78m55s
UK on submission to BBFC	74m05s

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	76m07s
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director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. script: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'Manfred Gregor']. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. production manager: **Werner Zeindler**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. line producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. An **Elite Film** Production. Eastmancolor.

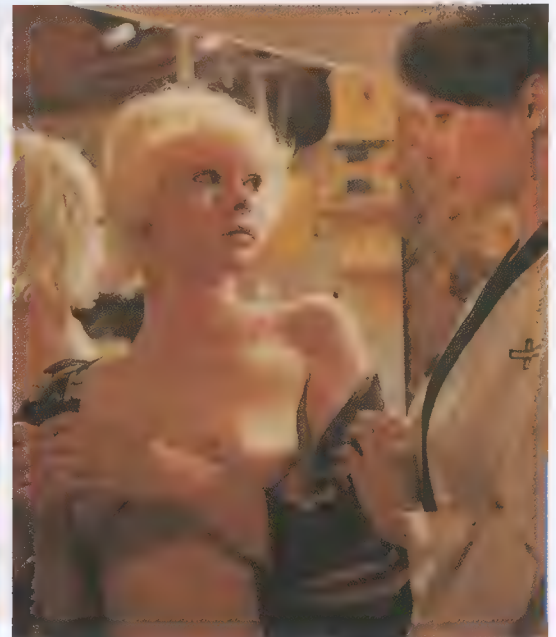
Cast: **Pamela Stanford** (Countess Edna Louise Schleier, aka 'Edie'). **Karine Gambier** (Millicent 'Milly' Antonia von Stein, Edie's sister). **Jack Taylor** (Dr. Charles Barnes aka Carlos Barrios). **Esther Moser** (Sarah, the maid). **Kurt Meinicke** (Joe, Milly's lover). **Marianne Graf** (Maria, Milly's nurse). **Eric Falk** [as 'Erik Falk'] (Tom, a barfly). *Uncredited:* **Mike Montana** (blond gigolo). **Walter Baumgartner** (Dr. Milton Arcos). *Uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (piano player in bar – hands only).

Synopsis: While attending a nightclub, Joe is propositioned by a seductive woman, Edie, who invites him to make love with her back at her house on the coast. Once there, Joe is invited to have sex with the host's sister Milly, who is delirious and desperate for sex. Joe and Milly make

passionate love, over and over, but next day he wakes to find himself in his car alone, on a deserted stretch of coast, unsure of how to find the house in daylight, or even whether what happened was just a dream... Milly, actually Millicent von Stein, heiress to a considerable family fortune, is unaware that her late parents' will leaves everything to her when she reaches 21. Jealous, controlling older stepsister Edie, aka the Countess Edna Von Stein, discovers that the will becomes void if Milly is deemed "mentally incompetent". However, if Milly dies the family fortune goes to charity, so murder is out of the question. Instead, Edie schemes with dodgy Doctor Barnes to drive Milly round the bend. While pretending to administer to Milly's 'problems' they keep her confined to bed, pumped full of mind-bending aphrodisiac drugs. Edie invites men she pulls in the strip joints downtown to ravage her confused sister. Milly can't tell if she's truly having sex or simply suffering a series of intense hallucinations. Some time later, Joe spots Edie at a restaurant. He trails her to her house and sets about rescuing the victimised Milly...

Review: Driving a sibling insane to collect on a contested will is a plot idea familiar from about two-thirds of the made-for-TV movies in the 1970s, as well as countless Italian giallo films. Franco's contribution to this overworked sub-genre is to add a dash of sex, with an evil stepsister (played by Pamela Stanford) using drug-induced nymphomania to drive her sister Milly (Karine Gambier) crazy. The result is one of Franco's less distinctive films, although he does manage to make his mark here and there. The energetic Pamela Stanford is as striking as ever, giving a deliciously camp performance as the rich bitch stepsister, and Jack Taylor delivers an amusing sketch of urbane malevolence as the doctor plotting with Edie to steal Milly's money. But the film really belongs to Karine Gambier as Milly, the perpetually aroused and manipulated heroine. A pouty platinum-blonde, previously the star of Jean Rollin's *La comtesse Ixe* (1976), Max Pécas's *Luxure* (1976) and Claude Mulot's *Échanges de partenaires* (1976), she projects lots of energy and vivacity but also real vulnerability, which gives the victimisation scenes a charge they would otherwise have lacked. Called upon to convey fear and arousal she goes enchantingly over the top, and consequently earns our sympathy in a scenario that could have been simply another exercise in sadism.

Franco frequently depicts female desire as something that cannot be satisfied by men, and *Satanic Sisters* initially seems to be moving along these lines. Edie, trolling a local sex club looking for men to screw her hungry-for-sex sister, picks up Joe (Kurt Meinicke), and when he bats aside her request for a cigarette and a drink, she snaps, "What I really want, big-shot, is a fuck." Having established her dominance, she suggests that they drive over to her place, but a sexual clinch in Joe's car becomes impractical when Edie finds herself wedged on the gear-stick. "Ah! What a big cock!" she laughs. "If you don't satisfy me I'll try your gearshift – I love it!" With Joe in danger of being outgunned by his Volkswagen Beetle, the scene is set for a humbling encounter with the insatiable Milly, and initially the scenario plays out as expected: "You're a wildcat!" gasps Joe, brought to an orgasm by her writhing, "I can't hold off any longer!"



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Edie (Pamela Stanford) invites Joe (Kurt Meinicke) back to her place for a night of fun ... Tom (Eric Falk) makes out with Edie and Milly's nurse Maria (Marianne Graf) ... Milly (Karine Gambier) accepts her nurse Maria's friendship without question; but should she? ... Doctor Barnes (Jack Taylor) celebrates with Edie and her maid Sarah (Esther Moser) after Milly is declared mentally unfit to administer her fortune.

However, *Satanic Sisters* takes an unexpected swerve when Joe turns out to be the answer to a nympho's prayers: he makes it with Milly twice in quick succession, and as the scene fades to black it seems he's ready to for a third. Sure enough, he gets the sex-crazed girl's highest accolade the following day: "I've been with lots of men, but never like the one last night. He satisfied me completely," she tells Dr. Barnes. This is unusual territory for Franco: his disdain for men as sexual athletes rarely allows for stud heroics. Perhaps *Satanic Sisters* was written by Erwin Dietrich, using the Manfred Gregor pseudonym? Given that both he and Franco wrote under that name at various times, it's possible. There's certainly something a little odd about *Satanic Sisters*, something less than Francoesque. Maria, brandishing a vibrator, says to Milly "I can't give you a man but maybe this will do." Milly replies, "Anything's better than nothing. Anything at all." This puts the film squarely in the 'woman as lack' category: the heroine's desires are not those of a crazed character like Doriana in *Die Marquise von Sade*, or Linda in *Lorna... the Exorcist*, films whose women overflowed with an abundant irrepressible sexuality, dangerous and overwhelming. Milly, to the contrary, is a classic case of the neurotically empty vessel, desperate for the phallus to complete her. The sex scenes feature three men, who each get to screw her, and allowing for the fact that they've been 'drafted' by Edie, they each take the dominant role: Joe falls in love with Milly and wants to save her; Tom (Eric Falk) screws her as part of the plot to drive her insane; and the obnoxious blond muscleman (Mike Montana), whom Edie pays to ravish the girl when she's out of her mind on drugs, is an out-and-out rapist. "You dirty bastard, I recognise you!" screams Milly, when he advances towards her on the bed, "You're the one who raped me when I was a little girl! Get out!" The assailant just leers and climbs on top of her – "The memory excites me. Give me your ass!" – before driving the drugged young woman to an involuntary orgasm. "Just like before – you loved it then and you'll love it now!" he smirks. It's at moments like this that notions of taste and propriety fly out of the window, and one must either back away in disgust or accept this as an expression of the blackest comedy. The flashback scenes flirt with genuine bad taste as we see Milly, aged twelve, hiding under a bed while her sister and a male lover make out fervently above her. When Milly makes a break for the bedroom door, the man looks up and sneers, "Hey! Don't run away little girl!" He then chases her, although Franco thankfully decides not to show the naked man grappling the child back into the bedroom. Later we see the teenage Milly spying on her sister giving head to another man – the scene is achieved through intercutting but suggests that the girl is becoming sexually aroused.

Despite all this, *Satanic Sisters* does not reside in the same bleak and nihilistic camp as the films of Alex De Renzy, Joe Davian or Shaun Costello; it's far too arch and playful for that. A good example is the scene in which Elite's finest, Eric Falk, ravishes the drugged and horny Gambier before apparently suffering a heart attack 'on the job'. This development, which hands Pamela Stanford the film's best line – "Why did you do it, Milly? You've killed

him you know, with your mad, passionate desires!" – leads to a scene in which the villainess drags our bare-assed giant away by the ankles (my personal favourite moment). Comedy, whether accidental or deliberate, is never very far away: Milly's psychiatrist, the decent but gullible Dr. Marcos, is tricked by Edie's lies into diagnosing Milly as a schizophrenic, but his prescription for her well-being is the medical advice from hell: "No alcohol. No drugs. And no sex at all. Not even masturbation." Of course unbeknownst to him Milly is being fed mind-bending drugs and screwed by a succession of shady gigolos, all of which begs the question: which would you prefer? Among its minor deficits, *Satanic Sisters* struggles to persuade us that genuine wealth is on show. Edie and Milly are supposed to be fantastically well off, with the house they live in left to them by their property magnate father. Unfortunately the apartment interior, with its tacky cane furniture, looks more like a hookers' apartment. And no wonder – it's just a set created at Dietrich's studios, with props, design and sundry small details revealing that it's the same space used as Arminda's apartment in *Die Sklavinnen*, the hooker's apartment in *Blue Rita*, and the working girls' hang-out in *Mädchen im Nachtverkehr!* Gold foil is glued to the doors in an attempt to make the place look expensive, but of course it ends up looking tacky and comical instead. *Satanic Sisters* also rubs up against a perennial problem for softcore sex scenes: making the sex plausible in the absence of male genital arousal. Franco, whether accidentally or maliciously, shoots a blow-job scene between Stanford and Kurt Meinicke in a way that gives the latter the illusion of a vagina: Stanford's hand completely covers his genitals as she licks and nuzzles at his public hair, so the close-ups look more like cunnilingus than fellatio!

There are a few further twists and turns, but they lead to an almost comically threadbare dénouement (something of a habit in these later Dietrich productions – see also *Love Camp* and *Women in Cellblock 9*) in which none of the villains have the balls to prevent Joe (dressed in a garish racing driver's jacket emblazoned with the name of Niki Lauder) from driving Milly to freedom in her vintage Rolls Royce. Wrapping up the story with a minute of limp dialogue is a cynical way to repay audiences who have bothered to follow the plot: perhaps it shows how little Franco expected us to care.

Franco on screen: Jess can be seen in German stills for the film playing piano in the bar where Stanford picks up Falk. In the film, however, he's visible only as a pair of hands on the piano keyboard. **Music:** *Satanic Sisters* opens with a mildly boring sex show, accompanied on the soundtrack by the sitar theme used throughout *Die Marquise von Sade*. The rest of the score is familiar from the preceding Dietrich productions, save for some odd orchestral cues such as the one that accompanies the 'zombie' Eric Falk's sexual assault on Milly.

Locations: A combination of Zürich studio sets familiar from *Blue Rita*, and some anonymous coastal exteriors.

French theatrical release: Released as *Les 2 sœurs vicieuses* in Paris, *Satanic Sisters* opened in seven cinemas, with more than 15,000 paying punters enjoying Milly's nymphomaniacal misery

between 19-25 September 1979. Under the title *Deux soeurs vicieuses* it went on to play the French provinces, although the release was spotty at best (I could only find evidence of a single week, in Rouen, with just 986 viewers in attendance: other screenings probably occurred elsewhere, but attendances were maybe too low to show up in the French trade magazine *Le Film Français*, whose weekly provincial figures disregard any film whose ticket sales fall below 800.)

UK theatrical release: A film called *Sexy Sisters* (one of the Franco film's alternative titles) played at the Jacey, Trafalgar Square in December 1976, but despite the BBFC website confusing the two, this was in fact a different film, made a year earlier than Franco's. Instead, *Satanic Sisters* was released to UK sex cinemas in 1980 under the highly commercial yet misleading title *Swedish Nympho Slaves*. (Could Gambier's platinum blonde hair explain the Swedish connection?) A 74m05s version was submitted to the BBFC and passed without cuts, although this was not the fate the film experienced in 1989, when video company Sheptonhurst Ltd submitted an already cut version of 68m18s under the same lurid title, only to have it trimmed by a further 9s! There is no further record of this video release, suggesting that it was quietly dropped or released in a fantastically obscure and minuscule run. ... When the film was released on UK DVD in 2004 by Anchor Bay, the rape scene was cut by 1m11s, as the BBFC website explains: "*A cut was required to remove an unambiguous rape scene where the principal character is raped by a man who raped her as a child, referring to her enjoyment of the previous rape and her enjoyment of the on-going rape.*"

Connections: It's never specified which drug Milly's doctor is injecting into her, but we assume it's some kind of an aphrodisiac hallucinogen or super-Ecstasy, with similar effects to the ointment used on men in *Blue Rita* or the alien unguent in *Shining Sex*. Drug-induced nymphomania recurs in numerous Franco films from here on: see *Je brûle de partout*, *Ópalo de fuego*, *Linda*, *Lilian (la virgen perversa)*, *The Sexual Story of 'O'*, *Esclavas del crimen* ... The character of Dr. Barnes and his secret plot with Edie recalls a similar set-up in *Nightmares Come at Night* (1969) ... The antique car belonging to Milly gets title billing and lots of screen time in a film Dietrich directed in 1975 called *Rolls Royce Baby*, starring Lina Romay ... Milly's psychiatrist Dr. Milton Arcos shares his name with the character played by Franco himself in *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, probably for no other reason than to re-use the brass nameplate stuck on the wall outside their respective offices! ... The golden cage in which Milly is kept recalls the similar one in *Un cage dorée* (1975), a film by Marius Lesoeur which Franco stepped in to help direct.

Other versions: None. The film has also done the rounds on video and DVD as *Sexy Sisters*, but apart from censorship trims there are no substantive differences.

Problematica: *Satanic Sisters* has become entangled in the CNC visa records with the 1973 Bitto Albertini film *Ton diable dans mon enfer*, and some contemporary French sources listed *Deux soeurs vicieuses* (*Ton diable dans mon enfer*) as the film's full title. However,

the two films are not related and Franco's film was never released with this 'portmanteau' title. What seems to have occurred is that the French visa number for the Albertini film was stolen and used for *Deux soeurs vicieuses* (probably by the film's French distributors Rex International), a ruse no doubt designed to avoid paying for a new visa registration fee! Certainly, the visa number itself (41042) is contemporaneous with numbers issued between such 1973 Franco productions as *Les Ébranlées* (40865, issued 3 October 1973) and *Les Croqueuses* (41408, 11 December 1974).

LOVE CAMP

(UK/US DVD & Blu-ray)

Switzerland, 1977

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Camp d'amour pour mercenaires (French-speaking SWI)

Love camp for Mercenaries

Alternative titles

Frauen im Liebeslager (German-speaking SWI theatrical/WG theatrical) *Women in the Love Camp*

Sex in a Woman's Love Camp (UK cine-club theatrical title)

Camp érotique (CAN French-speaking theatrical)

Mujeres en el campo de concentración del amor

(SP theatrical) *Women in the Love Concentration Camp*

Violacion entre rejas (ARG theatrical) *Violation Behind Bars*

Die Unersättliche (SWI video) *The Insatiable*

Sex Kazerne (NL video) *Sex Barracks*

Women in the Love Camp (1978 trade title reported in *Variety*)

Camp (title on actors' contracts issued by Elite-Film)

Unconfirmed titles

Οργια σε στρατοπεδο γυναικών (GRE video?)

Orgies in a Women's Camp

Camp d'amour (Belgian theatrical?)

Production company

Elite Film AG (Zürich)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (SWI/West Germany)

Filmways (Australia)

Timeline

Shooting date	20 June–04 July	1977
German 18-cert 49447 issued	11 October	1977
Germany	13 October	1977
UK (Portsmouth)	24 December	1977



TOP ROW: Chino (Wal Davis) learns that the Commander (Nanda Van Bergen) has been mistreating Angela (Ada Tauler) ... The Commander is briefed on her new duties.
 SECOND ROW: Chino demands to know whom Angela prefers, her rapist or her husband (unknown actor, centre) ... Ada Tauler in this posed shot, with Brigitte Meyer as Pepa Masul behind.
 THIRD ROW: Nanda Van Bergen, ice queen of the steamy swamps ... Maria (Monica Swinn) gets on the wrong side of the Commander ...
 FOURTH ROW: Maria seduces a prisoner with her playful antics ... Chino, unlikely sex god of the resistance, turns blushing bride Angela into his personal strumpet.

Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	17 February	1978
Rejected by the BBFC	04 September	1978
Zürich	18 June	1979
Madrid	18 June	1979
Seville	26 October	1979
Ottawa (Canada)	10 September	1979
Murcia	11 February	1981
Barcelona	14 November	1983

Theatrical running time

Switzerland	101m
Germany	71m45s

Video/DVD/Blu-ray running times (converted where necessary)

UK 'Iver' PAL VHS version	72m27s
Ascot-Elite Blu-ray	78m44s

director: **Jess Franco**. executive producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. script: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'Manfred Gregor']. set construction: **Walter Kaelin**. lighting: **Hans Zweifel**. director of photography: **Rudolf Küttel** [as 'Ruedi Kuettel']. camera assistant: **Marcel Just**. stills: **Ernst Spycher**. dubbing: **Karl-Heinz Reiber**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. props: **Arthur Peter**. costumes: **Lisa Enderli**. production manager: **Werner Zeindler**. sound recordist: **Hubertus Schmandtke**. line producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. An **Elite Film Production**. *Uncredited*: stills and Portuguese director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**.

Cast: **Nanda van Bergen** (Commander of the women's division, Camp A1 'Green Snake'). **Ada Tauler** (Angela De Lame, the bride). **Monica Swinn** [as 'Monica Swin'] (Maria Tiboldi [or Marga – contract spelling], lesbian prisoner). **Esther Studer** [as 'Ester Studer'] (Lupita Pavona/Perón, a virgin). **Brigitte Meyer** (Pepa Masul, the blonde prostitute). **Wal Davis** (Captain Chino da Guerra). *credited in German pressbook only*: **Monica Kaelin** (Tona, dark-haired prostitute). **Ingrid Kehr** (short-haired guard). **Maria P. Forster**. **Roman Huber** (guard leading chained convoy of women). *Uncredited*: **Karl Gysling** (goateed rebel fighter who rapes Lupita). **Jess Franco** (voice of parrot).

Notes: The English subtitles on the Swiss DVD claim that Wal Davis's character is called 'Gino' and the dubbing pronunciation sometimes suggests it. However, it more often sounds like 'Chino' and a synopsis in the German pressbook confirms this spelling.

Synopsis: *An unnamed South American country. The Independent Revolutionary Front abduct young women, indiscriminately, to act as whores for the revolutionary guerrillas. Angela is abducted on her wedding night and taken into sexual slavery. Once incarcerated she catches the eye of two opposing figures; rebel leader Chino da Guerra and a sadistic lesbian in charge of the 'love camp'. Angela experiences the pangs of guilty love as the rebel leader takes her physically to heights of ecstasy and then*

reveals his softer side. Meanwhile, the camp commander is seething with jealousy, and plans to drive a wedge between the two of them. Angela's love for her husband remains, but when the time comes, and she manages to escape the camp, who will she turn to – chauvinist sex-machine Chino, or Alberto, her decent, upstanding intellectual husband?

Review: The third of four 'Women-in-Prison' films which Franco made for Erwin C. Dietrich, *Love Camp* is the least sleazy and shocking of the group. If Dietrich gave Franco any prior instruction before making it, I suspect he asked him, for commercial reasons, to tone it down a bit. There's certainly nothing here to rival *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*'s infamous 'culo' scene (although that didn't stop the British censor from banning the film outright in September 1978). *Love Camp* 'cleans up its act' in a more literal way too: there's a neat and tidy quality to the locations and the women are well groomed, even glamorous: everything looks just a bit less scuzzy than the other films Franco made in this sub-genre. There's little of the verité sense of decay and despair that made *Barbed Wire Dolls* so disturbing. Instead the film is photographed cleanly and carefully by Rudolf Küttel, on bright, well-maintained sets and locations. There's even a brief but elegant crane shot, very rare in this period of Franco's cinema: the camera starts at ceiling level then ducks under an intervening archway to watch the Captain (Wal Davis) screwing Angela (Ada Tauler) on a hammock, lending the sequence a caressing quality that emphasises the heroine's conflicted feelings. When violence erupts, such as the protracted punishment scene in which the Chief Warden (Nanda Van Bergen) whips conniving lesbian Maria (Monica Swinn) and ballsy prostitute Tona (Monica Kaelin), Franco shows only the agonised faces of the victims as the warden's blows rain down; no shots of welts or bloody cuts and bruises. Such restraint may have provided Dietrich with a film he could market more widely, but it weakens the horror element: a scene in which Angela is tied to a metal bedframe arouses expectations of a brutal electrocution scene (as per *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*) but instead we see her sobbing because she's uncomfortably tied up. One's heart conspicuously fails to bleed.

That said, the film does stand out for its psychological dimension, and also for an aspect which rarely counts among the major assets of a Franco production: the dialogue. There are some great lines in the film which are now more apparent to English-speaking audiences thanks to a fan-dubbed version circulating among collectors, which takes the trouble to translate dialogue the official release does not. The first girl to challenge the love camp warden's authority pays a heavy price (she's beheaded off-camera) but she gets a great send-off thanks to some genuinely cutting dialogue. When the (nameless) Chief Warden berates the assembled abductees and informs them of their future roles as whores for the revolution, one girl explodes with rage and makes a run for it. Recaptured, and threatened with death for her disobedience, she snarls, "Murder me! Do away with me! Then you are unmasked, and everybody can see who you are: a blackmailer, a cold-blooded murderer

who beheads the very freedom she preaches." Goaded thus to kill, the Warden is caught in a trap. Her eyes flash with rage: she knows she is beaten intellectually, but in a telling detail we see her submit to the urge to kill. The challenger is beheaded (we see nothing except the horrified reactions of the others) but her point has been made. To the others who have seen the horror unfold, the Warden says *"I assume that will answer any further questions"*. But while this monster may rule through terror, the confrontation has undermined her symbolically: her brutality is an expression of impotence in the face of true freedom. The fact that the Warden is not given a name in the film is another symbolic castration: Franco denies this State-sanctioned bully the individuality a name would confer, unlike the five principle prisoners.

The Warden's submission to a force she cannot restrain, even though she knows it weakens her, is followed up elsewhere in the story, in a script that feels more developed than usual for Franco at this point in his career. Just as this vicious woman submits to her desire to kill, so too does the heroine, Angela, submit to a man she ought to despise. The meat of the story concerns Angela's seduction by Chino, the arrogant beer-swilling revolutionary captain whose idea it was to create the love camp in the first place. *"I've been missing having a hot mare like you,"* he tells her as he screws her for the first time. Tauler plays Angela with a proud aristocratic hauteur, and her abduction on her wedding night would seem to make any rapprochement with her tormentor unthinkable. Instead we see her submit to a man she knows she ought to resist. This seduction by forces that are intellectually repugnant mirrors the Warden's inability to meet the intellectual challenge of the disobedient prisoner. *"For you, pleasure is stronger than pride,"* Chino tells her as he screws her for the third time. *"One has to soften up someone like you, so that she gets what she deserves."* Angela's desire for the man who holds all the cards is more powerful than her contempt for his morals. Thus desire is portrayed as dangerous: a common theme in Franco's cinema. *"You see?"* mocks Chino after Angela climaxes, *"Now you've really been on top of Kilimanjaro. Your pride has completely gone to the dogs. Everything is okay."*

Angela is punished for her dalliance with the forces of oppression: her dignity must take a beating of a different kind, in a well-acted scene in which the Chief Warden regains the upper hand. Angela is plotting to seduce the Warden in order to escape. Her husband has snuck into the prison posing as one of the revolutionaries. All that's required is for Angela to seduce the Warden. She asks permission to visit her, and begins to pour out a spiel. Posing as a contrite and broken woman willing to accept the Warden's authority, she plays the cringing sex slave desperate to apologise for her prior rebelliousness. Just as she's warming to her theme, the Warden cuts her off with a sneer. *"I'm not interested in your reasons, and that's that. I am only interested in your body: its sensuality, the desire constantly emanating from you. So lie as much as you want. I think it's funny to see all that schmalitz dripping from you... I am completely immune to your verbal emotions."* Angela is intellectually humiliated because she imagined she could manipulate the Warden with her lies. Instead

she's told quite clearly that the only thing that guarantees her any favours is her body, her physical desirability. There is, however, another twist in this battle: the Warden thinks she has put her would-be manipulator in her place, but she's unaware that Angela is not merely trying to gain softer treatment from her tormentor; she intends to escape completely. Desire is the Warden's downfall. She may be immune to Angela's tongue when it lies, but not when it licks. As Angela starts chewing her oppressor's pussy, once again it's lust that proves to be the warden's downfall: first her lust to kill, and now her lust for sex.

Lesbianism is, of course, a vital ingredient in this drama, and who better to play the role of the manipulative 'dyke' with her eye on the luscious new arrivals than the ever-compelling Monica Swinn? Having given Franco the definitive 'wicked warden' in *Barbed Wire Dolls*, here she plays a prisoner on the make, and for once Franco gives the familiar role of the scheming prison lesbian some human shading. When first she makes a move on naive Esther Studer, one of the other prisoners intervenes to save the nervous ingenue. But after the girl has lost her virginity to the evil Warden, and been raped by a slobbish soldier, she comes to welcome the affection Maria offers. After all, the two of them were raped by grunting soldiers side by side in their beds, exchanging mute looks of sympathy as indignity is forced upon them. That's hetero gang rape as lesbian bonding opportunity – very Jess Franco! *"You look like you'd be as hot as chilli but you lie there like a slaughtered calf,"* complains the partisan raping Maria, disconcerted by her icy detachment. Maria's seduction of Lupita is sealed when she amuses the tearful girl by playfully dancing a cigar up and down her body, before putting it in her snatch, pulling it out, then lighting and smoking it! Laughter replaces Lupita's tears and Maria has won her 'conquest', but unlike the other 'games' going on in the camp it's by fair means rather than foul. It's really a rather sweet scene and Swinn handles it beautifully, allowing her own playfully sardonic character to emerge. This sympathetic picture of Maria is complicated, however, by a plot development that comes out of nowhere. Maria betrays Angela to the guards – but why? Having proven herself a friend to the vulnerable Lupita, she then betrays Angela for no apparent reason and gets righteously beaten up for it by the furious Tona. While it's perfectly fine to create a character with both strengths and flaws, it would help if we had some inkling of why she's turned snitch. At least it gives us the scene that follows, in which Tona loses her temper with Maria. It's violent and explosive, one of the highlights of this sometimes rather leisurely film, and there's one small detail that sells it: when Kaelin stops, she's sweating: a real sweat, borne of exertion, something this film generally lacks.

We never learn exactly where the film is supposed to be set: just 'somewhere in South America'. The opening scenes, in which so-called revolutionaries kidnap various women (anyone from hookers waiting for a john to a blushing bride on her wedding night), suggest a politically pointed tale in which the leftist intelligentsia's favourite causes in Latin America are revealed as corrupt

patriarchal regimes-in-waiting. Political comment, however, takes second place to farce; the abductions are followed by a scene of women being marched through the jungle in shackles, which goes on for so long it's surely meant to be funny. Certainly the English dubbing artists thought so: "Come on, keep moving you whimpering whores!"; "Aren't you enjoying our stroll through the woods?"; "What a lousy chorus-line! Keep in step, girls"; "Move along, there's a snake following you! Aha-ha-ha!" Almost three minutes of this nonsense is sustained, with whimsical 'Nelly the Elephant' music smirking away in the background. Whoever chose the music fully intended the scene to feel ridiculous.

Love Camp is also graced with the most hilarious pay-off of any Franco movie of the period. I simply *have* to explain it, so if you're trying to avoid spoilers, for heaven's sake look away now. When Angela is confronted with a choice between heroic husband Alberto (who has joined the rebels in order to spring his blushing bride from jail) and revolutionary cad Chino (who has used and abused women, captured her husband, and sent a gang of escapees back into the clutches of the wicked camp commander), she opts for Chino! Yes, that's right, the heroine ditches her loving hubby and goes for the sex-machine fascist who's responsible for setting up this 'love camp' in the first place! Off skips Angela, nipples erect, leaving poor old Alberto, who'd trimmed his moustache and everything, well and truly stuffed.

Franco on screen: Franco does not appear, but he dubs a potty-mouthed parrot, as also heard in *Die Sklavinnen*.

Music: Standard Walter Baumgartner cues, with lots of bongos to remind you it's a jungle out there.

Locations: The tropical garden of Monserrate Palace in Sintra, Portugal, provides the exteriors. The foyer of the love camp where new arrivals are lined up is the hallway at Villa Sonnenberg in Zürich, one of the two main studio set-ups used in the Dietrich productions.

US theatrical release: English-language poster artwork for the film has led some to presume an American theatrical showing. In fact the artwork relates to Canadian and Australian releases. I can find no evidence that the film ever played in the USA, unless it appeared under a hitherto unreported alternative title.

UK theatrical release: *Love Camp* was submitted for theatrical release in the UK by Mark Associates as *Sex in a Woman's Love Camp*, but the film was rejected outright by the censor on 4 September 1978. (A fairly small distributor, Mark Associates weren't having much luck: they'd already seen Umberto Lenzi's cannibal flick *Deep River Savages* banned a couple of years before.) By the time the BBFC had turned it down, however, it had already played around the UK cinema club circuit, including the English coastal city of Portsmouth where it played the Tatler Cinema on 24 December 1977 alongside the German porno film *Sex Hostesses* (*Mädchen auf Stellungssuche – Der Hostessen-Sex-Report*, 1973). This is a rare example of a film that bypassed the BBFC before being banned (cinema clubs were permitted to show unlicensed films to members only, although in practise becoming a member

simply involved buying a season pass two or three hours before the screening). *Sex in a Woman's Love Camp* should not be confused with the Brunello Rondi film *Sex Life in a Women's Prison* aka *Prigione di donne* (1974), or indeed *Love in a Woman's Prison*, which was the UK 'X' version of Rino de Silvestro's sleazy *Diario segreto da un carcere femminile* (1974). Nor should it be confused with a later release called *Love Camp* which was in fact *Die Todesgöttin des Liebescamps* (dir: Christian Anders, 1981) starring Laura Gemser.

Spanish theatrical release: An admat appeared in the Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* on 3 October 1980, advertising the film as a coming attraction under its Spanish title *Mujeres en el campo de concentración del amor*. However, for some unknown reason the film was then withdrawn for three years before finally reaching Barcelona on 14 November 1983. The distributor's logo on the admat indicates that it was being handled by Cineteca, the same company who'd shepherded the Spanish release of Franco's *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*.

Connections: There's a trace of Stockholm Syndrome to Ada Tauler's relationship with Wal Davis's oafish Captain, probably stimulated by then-recent news stories about Patty Hearst, who was convicted the year before, on March 20, 1976 ... The paperback book Monica Swinn is holding when we first see her is *Shock Tactics*, one of a series of secret agent novels by the French crime writer Jean Bruce featuring his best known creation, Hubert Bonisseur de La Bath, aka OSS 117 ... "He'll make her a revolutionary heroine. They'll play Danton and Lucile," says Monica Kaelin's character when Ada Tauler is chosen by revolutionary leader Wal Davis to be his personal sex slave. This appears to be a reference to two important figures from the French Revolution. Georges Jacques Danton (1759–1794) is considered by many historians to have been one of the prime movers in the overthrow of the monarchy and establishment of the First French Republic. He was guillotined after accusations of leniency to the enemies of the Revolution. Lucile would seem to refer to Anne Lucile Philippe Laridon Duplessis (1770–1794), wife of the French revolutionary Camille Desmoulins, who was arrested on charges that she had conspired to free her husband (imprisoned in the Luxembourg Prison with Georges Danton). She was executed with her husband in 1794. I confess that any precise parallel between these two figures and the characters in *Love Camp* remains obscure to me.

Other versions: None currently found.

Problematica: A Belgian release called *Camp d'amour* turns up in the listings given for Brussels in *Le Film Français* dated 25 January 1978. Could this refer to the Franco film? It's too early for the other main contenders: Eduardo Mulargia's *Femmine infernali* aka *Les évadées du camp d'amour* (1980) for instance, or Christian Anders' *Die Todesgöttin des Liebescamps*, released in France as *Camp d'amour* (1981). So maybe *Love Camp* did see a Belgian release? Quite a few of the Franco-Dietrich productions did: *Downtown*, *Jack the Ripper*, *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and *Blue Rita* all played there. Sadly, without a poster to back up the theory, it's a little hard to be sure.

VOODOO PASSION

(UK/US DVD title)

Switzerland, 1977

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Der Ruf der blonden Göttin (SWI/WG)

Call of the Blonde Goddess

Alternative titles

Ruf der Blonden Göttin (WG theatrical poster/video)

Cri d'amour de la Déesse blonde (FR theatrical)

Love Cry of the Blonde Goddess

Las diosas del porno (SP theatrical) *The Goddesses of Porn*

Porno Shock (IT theatrical)

Porno gola profonda (IT theatrical reissue) *Porno Deep Throat*

Märät Unet aka **De vâta drömmarna** (FIN video – Finnish & Swedish language titles) *Wet Dreams*

Vengeance de la Déesse nue (shooting title)

Vengeance of the Nude Goddess

The Vengeance of the Blonde Goddess

(1978 trade title reported in *Variety*)

La Déesse nue [*Analyse des Films* 1978 listing] *The Nude Goddess*

Unconfirmed titles

Le Cri d'amour de la Déesse blonde

Les Cri d'amour de la Déesse blonde

Sorcellerie et voluptés vaudoues (*Witchcraft and Voodoo Pleasures*)

Passions et voluptés vaudoues (*Voodoo Passions and Pleasures*)

Le revanche de la Déesse nue (*The Hand of the Naked Goddess*)

Production company

Nestor Film (Zürich)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih (SWI/West Germany)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa mid	1977
German 18-cert 49574 issued	06 December	1977
Germany	09 December	1977
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	17 February	1978
Zürich	July	1978
French visa 49577 issued	12 October	1978
France – provincial	17 February	1979
Paris	14 March	1979
Rome (as <i>Porno Shock</i>)	11 August	1979
Madrid	21 September	1981
Seville	19 October	1981
Cartagena	07 December	1981
Barcelona	21 December	1981
Turin (as <i>Porno gola profonda</i>)	29 January	1985

Theatrical running time

Switzerland 89m

Germany 82m10s

France 87m

Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite 86m05s

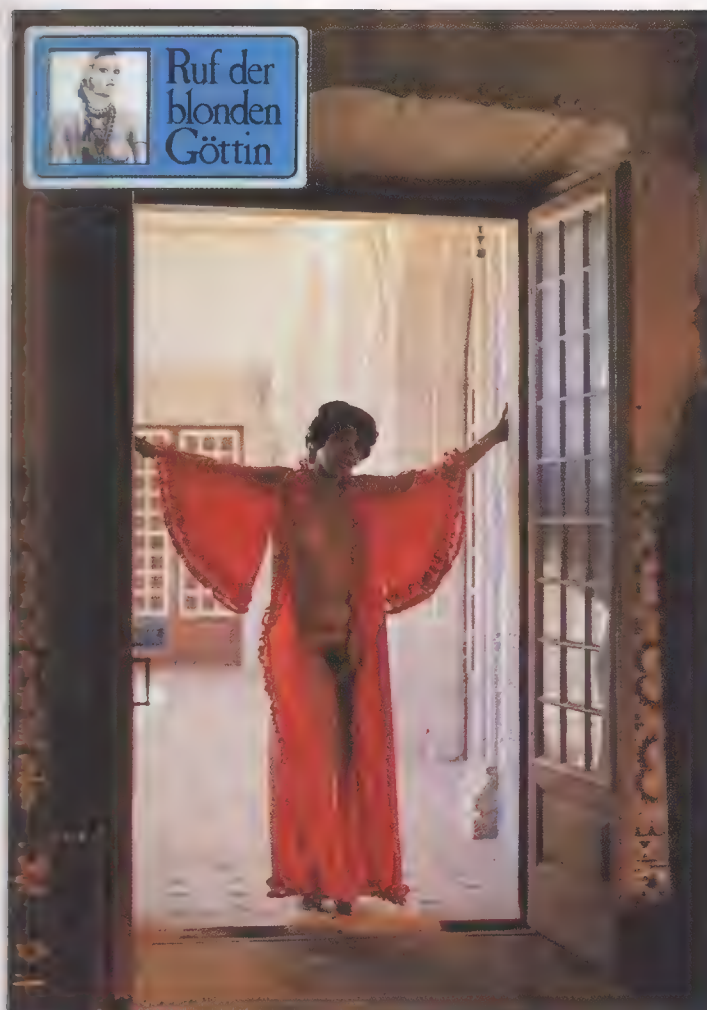
director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. script: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'Manfred Gregor']. director of photography: **Andreas Demmer**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. production manager: **Werner Zeindler**. line producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. A **Nestor Film** Production. *Uncredited*: script: **Jess Franco**. *Uncredited*: stills and Portuguese director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**.

Cast: **Vicky Adams** (Inés, Jack's housekeeper). **Ada Tauler** (Susan Haus). **Karine Gambier** (Olga, Jack's 'sister'). **Jack Taylor** ('Jack Haus' aka Patrick Forrester, Consul of the British Embassy). **Vítor Mendes** [as 'Victor Mendez'] (Dr. Pierre Barré, a psychiatrist). **Aida Gouveia** (Ida, Jack's secretary). **Ly Frey** (Marian Hawkins, Jack's dinner guest). *IT poster adds*: **Anne Sand**. *Spanish pressbook adds*: **Rita Morena**. **Sandra Daenliker**.

Notes: The Italian poster adds 'Siegrid Sellier' [aka Segfried Sellier] but she does not appear in the film.

Synopsis: Susan arrives in Haiti to live with her husband Jack, a British diplomat posted on the island. At the quayside she is greeted by Inés the housekeeper, who takes her to Jack's splendid home. There she meets Ida, Jack's secretary, and the provocative Olga, a nymphomaniac platinum blonde, introduced to her as Jack's sister. Jack himself seems pleasant but slightly detached; at the British consul he introduces Susan to Dr. Pierre Barré, a psychiatrist. Susan begins to have nightmares about voodoo ceremonies and murder. But are they only dreams, or is something more sinister and deadly at work? Susan finds herself repeatedly drawn to a forest clearing at night, where Inés makes love to her and seduces her into voodoo ceremonies with a group of local Haitians. Forces beyond her comprehension drive Susan to kill people associated with Jack; first Mr. Raudier, a French diplomat, and then a young couple planning to move to Haiti, Mr. Hawkins and his wife Marian. But who can she trust? What role do Inés, Olga and Ida play in her plight? And is her husband really plotting against her?

Review: The first thing that strikes you about *Voodoo Passion* is the sunshine. It's a summer holiday on celluloid, a luxurious get-away-from-it-all vacation captured in 24fps glory. Perhaps the twin themes of mind control and sexual betrayal dampen the frivolity, but only slightly; Andreas Demmer's sun-soaked photography and the radiant Portuguese locations are the dominant forces in the film, and even when the drama takes a sinister turn it never truly



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Susan (Ada Tauler) explores her new home with a lack of restraint that belies her 'English rose' background ... Susan, Inés (Vicky Adams) and Olga (Karine Gambier), voodoo priests at the doorway to sensual excess... Angela confronts Olga about the strange voodoo doll she has found ... Angela's fears prove all too real as she is drawn into a web of murder and mind control...

sinks into darkness, spiritual or otherwise. Even the night shooting seems to take place as dawn is breaking.

The second thing to note is the dubbing. The English dub on a Franco film is often a bit of a mess, but for once they got it right. Everyone is so achingly posh that it brought a smile to my lips before the action had even begun. It helps that the characters are intended to be British, with Jack Taylor playing an English ambassador working in Haiti, so the plummy isn't just a whim on the part of a bored voice artist. When his wife Susan (Ada Tauler) arrives on the island to visit her husband she is greeted at the quayside by a statuesque (and *very* posh) woman called Inés (Vicky Adams), Jack's impeccably well-spoken housekeeper. She claims to be part-Haitian, although she looks more like a Teutonic ice-maiden, with demeanour to match. The set-up, as explained to us by Inés on the drive to the main location (which is probably where the cast learned of it too) vaguely recalls Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, with a naive wife arriving at an impressive mansion owned by her new but curiously distant husband. Susan quickly dispenses with the Joan Fontainisms, though, when she encounters a platinum-blond beauty called Olga (the always wonderful Karine Gambier) lounging nude in her boudoir. Olga immediately makes lesbian advances, introducing herself as Jack's sister and purring: "*I'm his baby doll. I always cuddle up to him for protection. It's a very pure relationship.*" Susan, though shocked to begin with, rapidly gets over her misgivings. One minute she's alarmed to find Olga frolicking in the bathtub, the next, via a comic edit, she's answering the phone in the nude while lascivious Olga makes catty remarks in the background.

Olga is a wonderfully overblown creation, a character who'd be perfectly at home in a sleazy giallo like *Strip Nude for Your Killer* or some other lunatic Italian confection, say *Killer Nun* or *The Red Queen Kills Seven Times*. Erotically obsessed, and seemingly unable to resist wriggling around on whatever flat surface is available, she even masturbates with a bottle of Rémy Martin – a sure sign that this is the high life, Seventies-style. The film was cut together from Portuguese location work (in Sintra again) and Zürich studio material, creating an appealing mix of gorgeous baroque classicism and over-the-top tackiness. The profusely mirrored bedroom and bathroom ensure that the sex scenes are interesting and amusing to watch, while the furnishings, reflected into multiple reiterations, are a treasure trove of seventies über-kitsch: baby-blue moulded bathtubs with gold fittings, royal blue wallpaper, potted ferns everywhere, gilt-edged mirrors a-go-go, and – my favourite – a two foot high ceramic leopard in the corner. Grrrr!

For a while, life in this gilded bubble seems idyllic. Husband and wife bathe and shave and prepare for the day, stark naked, while sister Olga, also nude, jokes and teases Susan and demands to know all about her sex life: "*Did you fuck my brother enough last night? We could hear you all over the house. You sounded crazy!*" Yet into this heaven, darkness of a kind must come. It begins at night when Susan, who can't sleep, ventures into the garden – confusingly, it's already daylight, although a dreamlike haze makes the exact time

ambiguous. As this is precisely the sort of film in which a woman might walk around in public wearing a nightgown left open to reveal her breasts and vagina, we can't decide if it's all a dream or just a sign that Susan is unusually uninhibited for an English rose. In a daze, she encounters Inés, who silently escorts her to a strange ruin in the gardens, where naked Haitians dance to the insistent pound of drums.

The arrival of these two white women signals a change of mood, as well as a change of musical style. To the accompaniment of a piece that sounds like a lounge band covering a track from Miles Davis's *On the Corner*, Inés joins the 'natives' and performs a dance which is surely the highlight of the film. Adams's enthusiastic cavorting suggests a Western pop influence, thanks to some classic 'Pan's People' dance moves (you know the kind of thing – 'close the curtains melodramatically; first the left, then the right', or 'I give you a precious gift, now I pull you to my bosom'). I found myself looking for Flick Colby in the credits. A second scene of 'voodoo passion' in the same location features even more nudity, including some very frank shots of an excitable young man, the angle of whose dangle is within seconds of broaching the softcore legalities. The inclusion of male as well as female nudity is a bold and entirely laudable move on Franco's part: when Susan witnesses her husband having sex with Olga, we even get a clear, if unexpected, view of Jack Taylor's family jewels. Good for him! In a world where women disrobe with alacrity, it ill becomes a man to be bashful, so three cheers for his willingness to join in.

After the halfway mark the film turns into yet another variation on *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, with a woman ordered to kill while under mesmeric influence. This was one of Franco's favourite plot skeletons, around which he draped so many different narrative garments, from lush and elaborate to flimsy and forgettable. This time, there's little that improves on previous attempts, but somehow it doesn't matter. There's a sense of fun here that goes a long way towards excusing the self-derivative nature of the story.

Although I thoroughly enjoyed this light and sunny film, it's the critic's job to moan about things wherever possible, and the flaws are certainly there. Among the less serious shortcomings is a wasted scene which could, if handled properly, have been both exciting and thematically significant. In a sequence that may or may not be another of Susan's hallucinations, the 'voodoo' dancers and musicians appear at night in the hallowed halls of her husband's residence. So far the film has scrupulously followed a logic of division and separation, with indoors being for 'the whites' (a Western space for culture, art and language) and outdoors for 'the blacks' (open spaces marked by nature, primitivism, religion and music). The virtue of the scene in question is that it symbolically violates this split. It's just a pity that the cultural tension, thus located, is then dismissed, with nothing of real importance happening in the scene. (Note however that sex takes place both indoors and outdoors in the film, suggesting that, for Franco, desire always crosses such barriers.)

All of which brings us to the treatment of race, and I have to

say that in general *Voodoo Passion* lacks an intelligent approach to the subject. It's not a complete disaster: Franco takes his camera to southern Portugal, with its North African settlers, and drives through market streets thronging with local people going about their daily lives. The images are shot from a car belonging to the lead couple who never interact with anyone outside, but at least we see for a while an 'ethnic' location of a kind travel-brochure pornos rarely bother to acknowledge. However, the absence of speaking roles for black performers is a major let-down. *Voodoo Passion* lacks the perspicacity to include a significant black voice in a film which trades salaciously on a black nation and its beliefs. It's only when revelations pile up in the last ten minutes that a black character speaks, and even then it's just one line! In a time and a genre where casual racism frequently deprived black actors of a voice while exploiting the 'exoticism' of their skin colour, it's a shame that Franco, a well-travelled man who certainly knew better (see *La muerte silba un blues* and *Riffifi en la ciudad*), couldn't have concocted a more racially inclusive script.

And yet despite these misgivings, I enjoyed the hell out of *Voodoo Passion*. The mixture of familiar motifs, lovely settings, fabulous interiors, daffy dialogue ("No Mr. Hawkins, I've never personally met a zombie") and perversely likeable characters (especially dear Olga) went straight to my pleasure centres. It's no masterpiece, but it's an unexpectedly warm and amusing experience: not exactly what you'd expect from Franco's tenure as sado-pornmeister for Erwin Dietrich.

Cast and crew: Vicky Adams, who plays Inés, is a tall, compelling young woman with a thousand yard stare and enough facial make-up to deflect a bullet. For years, following the lead of *Obsession*, sources such as the IMDb have listed 'Vicky Adams' as a pseudonym for Nanda Van Bergen, who plays the brutal commander in *Love Camp*. This is incorrect: the two women are quite different (Van Bergen has steely grey-blue eyes; Adams's are brown). Further traps lie in store when one notices that Muriel Montossé, who appears in four Franco films (*Ópalo de fuego*; *Devil Hunter*; *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*; *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle*), sometimes used the pseudonym 'Vicky Adams'. However, whilst there are definite similarities between the two in bone structure, careful examination of their eyes and teeth proves otherwise: Vicky Adams in *Voodoo Passion* (made in 1977) has perfectly straight teeth, while Muriel Montossé in *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* (made in 1982) has fanged canines and uneven incisors. The name 'Vicky Adams' is almost certainly a pseudonym, but who this intensely photogenic and commanding actress really is remains a tantalising mystery ... Look out for a casually surreal moment near the start of the film. We see a group of black men lounging on a wall overlooking the harbour, intercut with a shot of people disembarking from the ship. If you look carefully you'll see that the same men are used in both shots!

Music: Thankfully, given the repetitious scoring that afflicts the Dietrich films, many of the cues here are new. A sustained passage for bongos and synthesiser comes across like something from

one of the stranger backwaters of early Popol Vuh or Tangerine Dream, before segueing into the best passage of the film, the aforementioned 'jazzercise' routine, which features guitar, sax, electric piano and flute overlaid with palpitating hand-percussion.

Locations: The Sintra region of Portugal is once again used for the main exteriors, including the verdant gardens. The interiors are partly filmed at the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães in Cascais (the entrance hall of Jack's house with its distinctive nude statue, for instance), and partly on sets at Dietrich's Zürich studio (including Susan's room, the distinctive blue bathroom, the Hawkins' bedroom, and the dining room). The quayside where Susan is picked up by Inés is located at 108 Av. Dom Carlos I in Cascais, immediately beside the Palácio da Cidadela de Cascais. Franco filmed there several times, and he always positioned the camera in the same place without panning or varying the angle. I visited Cascais in 2018 and discovered the reason for this very particular choice of camera placement: a large and rather unattractive sculpture of the 19th century Portuguese king, Dom Carlos I, which stands close by. Franco must really have hated this statue, because he repeatedly refused to include it in his shots! The same location reappears in *Je brûle de partout* (1978) and *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* (1980).

French theatrical release: As *Cri d'amour de la Déesse blonde*, *Voodoo Passion* played a two week run in Paris, beginning on 14 March 1979. For the first week it played in three cinemas, the Cinevog Saint-Lazare, Cinevog Montparnasse and the Ritz. For the second it played in two, with occasional revivals in the years to come, including one booking at the Pix as late as May 1983.

Connections: As noted, the plot recycles the hypno-assassin theme from *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit*.

WICKED WOMEN

(Swiss DVD title)

Switzerland, 1977

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Frauen ohne Unschuld (SWI/WG) *Women Without Innocence*

Alternative titles

Insaziabili notti di una ninfomane (IT theatrical)

Insatiable Nights of a Nymphomaniac

Naiset ilman hapyä (FIN theatrical) *Shameless Women*

Het huis der manzieke vrouwen (NL video)

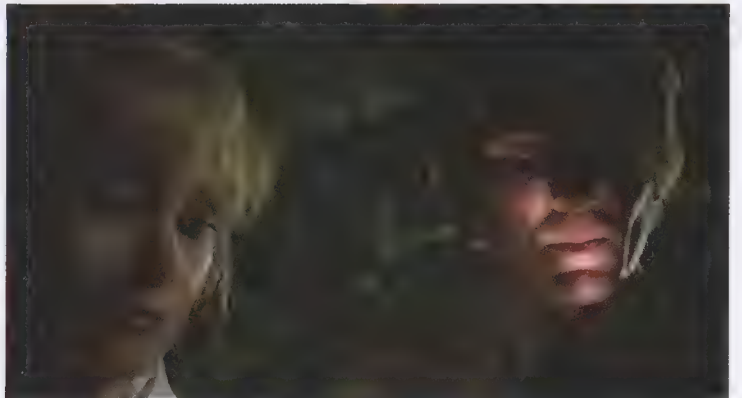
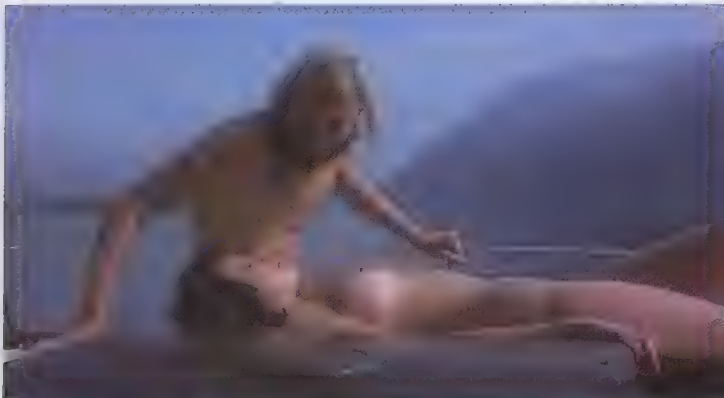
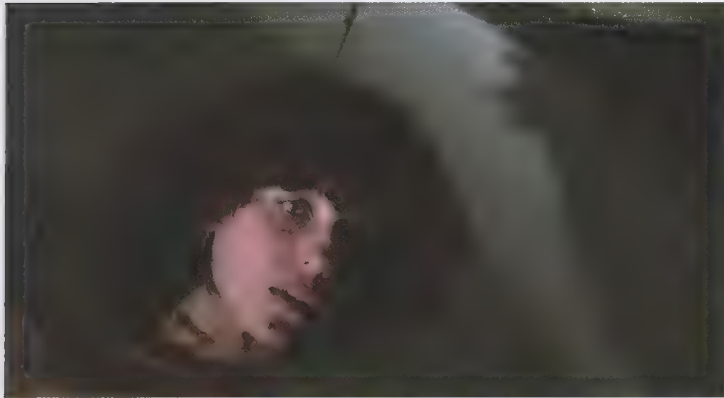
House of Nymphomaniacs

Wicked Women Das Haus der Mannstollen Frauen

(SWI Blu-ray cover)

Women Without Innocence (1978 trade title reported in *Variety*)

Virginité (title on actors' contracts from Elite-Film)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Petra (Esther Studer) turns up dead ... Dishy Doctor Antonio (one-time German pop star Michael Maien) gains the confidence of Margerita (Lina Romay), but can she really trust him? ... Dr. Farkas (Kurt Meinicke) and his wife Irina (Nanda Van Bergen) have their own reasons for taking an interest in Margerita's case ... Rich but emotionally unstable swinger, Sandra Mauro (Monica Swinn), meets Margerita in the Italian town of Cannobio, on the banks of Lake Maggiore... "Eucalyptus!" - Ruth, a patient with religious mania, played fervently by an unknown actress with a shaky grasp of English ... Petra talks to Gabi, a sex addict patient played by glamorous blonde Brigitte Meyer ... Dr. Antonio has a rather unethical treatment regime for Margerita ... Margerita and Sandra's husband get to know one another...

*Unconfirmed titles***Femmes sans pudeur****Femmes sans innocence***Production company***Elite Film** (Zürich)*Theatrical distributor***Avis Filmverleih** (SWI/West Germany)*Timeline*

Shooting dates	26 Sept-4 Oct	1977
German 18-cert 49717 issued	07 February	1978
Germany	09 February	1978
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	31 March	1978
Genova (Italy)	17 December	1979
Rome	03 June	1981

Theatrical running time

Germany	76m36s
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Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	80m12s
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director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. script: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'Manfred Gregor']. set construction: **Walter Kaelin**. lighting: **Edgar Reiser**. director of photography: **Peter Baumgartner**. camera assistant: **Marcel Just**. stills: **Ernst Spycher**. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. props: **Arthur Peter**. production manager: **Werner Zeindler**. An **Elite Film** Production.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Margerita Martin). **Michael Maien** (Doctor Antonio). **Nanda Van Bergen** (Irina Farkas, Doctor Farkas's wife). *Credited on Italian poster only:* **Dagmar Bürger** (Peggy, kleptomaniac patient). **Esther Studer** (Petra, the 2nd 'murder victim'). *Credited on German video-cover only:* **Monica Swinn** (Sandra Mauro). *Uncredited:* **Kurt Meinicke** (Dr. E. Farkas, psychiatrist). **Peggy Markoff** (Emilia, opera-singing patient). **Peter Baumgartner** (Inspector Risi). **Brigitte Meyer** (Gabi, blonde sex addict patient). **Ly Frey** (Nurse Helga).

Synopsis: *Found traumatised and smeared with blood at a house where a couple of diamond smugglers have been brutally slain, a beautiful young woman called Margerita is admitted to a Swiss mental asylum. Whatever she has seen or done, she is now mute, unable to communicate except for cries and moans of distress. Doctor Fargas and his wife Irina, along with their handsome and popular associate Doctor Antonio, probe, seduce and cajole Margerita in an attempt to restore her powers of speech. But are the staff really interested in her psychological well-being, or are they more interested in the report of hidden diamonds supposedly belonging to the dead couple? And who is murdering the other patients?*

Review: Despite the common perception of Franco's Dietrich period as squalid and pornographically sleazy, *Wicked Women* (like the under-rated *Voodoo Passion*) has an oddly graceful ambience at times, thanks to a combination of lush, attractive scenery and a better-than-average score from Walter Baumgartner. Filmed in stunning locations on the banks of Lake Maggiore in Italy, this giallo-inflected story of a traumatised murder witness involved in a diamond-smuggling intrigue may not boast the exploitation chops of *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* or the artistic experimentation of *Die Marquise von Sade*, but it's a decent story which imports Franco's Women-in-Prison motifs into the 'corrupt lunatic asylum' subgenre beloved of American exploitation (see *Don't Look in the Basement*; *Asylum of Satan*; *Human Experiments*; *The Fifth Floor*). Where the overall tone of *Voodoo Passion* was luxuriant and camp, the atmosphere in *Wicked Women* is languid and mysterious, although the mood is perhaps weakened by a few too many softcore sex interludes. Nevertheless, it's an attractive and enjoyable film that deserves more attention from Franco aficionados. It's also pretty funny at times, with some choice snippets of dialogue ("They're all as dumb as a box of hair!" – or "Isn't it crazy? I was so afraid of you, and now you're giving me the fuck of my life!") helping to keep you engaged, even as the plot stays in second gear.

Although she doesn't speak an intelligible word for two-thirds of the film, Lina Romay is genuinely sympathetic as the terrified and confused Margerita. Sporting an androgynous haircut and looking all the prettier, her vulnerable and sympathetic performance is the chief focus of the story. It's a relatively chaste part for her, with little in the way of explicit sexual activity or nudity (one startling vaginal close-up excepted), and the fact that we care about the character is down to Romay's natural ability – clothed or unclothed – to communicate with the camera. Margerita's frightening experiences at the clinic provide the film's standout scenes, beginning with an atmospheric sequence in which she wanders through the asylum gardens and finds a mysterious stairway, leading to a building whose empty white-walled rooms reverberate with dreamlike menace. Franco creates a wonderfully ominous sense here of the heroine sleepwalking helplessly into danger, while Baumgartner's music underscores the dreaminess of the scene. Nurse Helga (played by an unnamed actress who looks annoyingly similar to fellow cast-member Esther Studer, but isn't) follows Margerita inside, and is suddenly pounced upon by a caped male figure who ravishes and then stabs her. Fainting with shock as she witnesses the attack, Margerita revives to find Helga hanging by the neck from the ceiling. The whole sequence would not be out of place in the Italian giallo films of Sergio Martino or Umberto Lenzi. Franco, however, is unmistakably in the driving seat: after Margerita faints for the second time the next shot is an explicit close-up of Lina Romay's vaginal lips closing after an intimate examination by Doctor Fargas. "She has been raped!", he announces, to which his bitchy wife Irina adds, "So what? Maybe it's the exact remedy she needed!" Ladies and gentlemen, Jess Franco has not left the building...

Amid the usual suspects in Dietrich's cast (hello again to Esther Studer, Dagmar Bürger, Kurt Meinicke), Nanda Van Bergen is striking and amusing, although she's given less to do here than her over-the-top role in *Love Camp*. She's amazing to look at, though, lending dramatic emphasis with her bone structure alone. Monica Swinn, following her appearance in *Love Camp* a couple of months earlier, also stands out as a welcome visitor from the true Franco family (i.e. those whose relationship with Jess was personal as well as professional). Here she plays Sandra, a bisexual drug-smuggler who ensnares Lina Romay's ingenue in a smuggling racket. The chief area of interest is Sandra's collapse into alcoholic bitterness and jealousy. The fact that Swinn plays these scenes so well (quite frighteningly at times) helps to ameliorate the lack of groundwork in the script for her switch from seductress to weeping harriidan. One minute she's encouraging Margerita to make out with her husband; the next thing she's hurling drunken abuse at the two of them. We can tell that the love affair was meant to be faked, and that Sandra is now paranoid that it's turned into the real thing for her husband, but a couple of extra scenes are needed to sell the switch effectively. Indeed it's the scripting which lets the side down overall: *Frauen ohne Unschuld* is meant to be a thriller but there's very little intrigue in the dialogue: there's not a lot to say about the scheming characters besides the simple fact that they're scheming.

Perhaps, if we dig a little deeper into the biographical circumstances of Franco and Romay at the time, we might see the character played by Monica Swinn as an arm's length surrogate for Romay's recently divorced husband, Ramón Ardid? Someone who encourages a spouse to get intimate with another person, but then collapses into jealous anger when the relationship begins to blossom? If so, the metaphor breaks down very quickly: it's hardly feasible to read Jess Franco in the ingenue role!

Cast and crew: Good-looking Michael Maien, who plays the key role of Dr. Antonio, was an interesting figure in German popular culture, having essayed both a pop career and a mainstream acting career in the mid-to-late 1960s, before venturing into sexploitation (he's in the 1968 version of Erwin C. Dietrich's *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst*, a film which Dietrich later remade in 1980). He went on to appear in a slew of sex comedies, including *Hochzeitsnacht-Report* aka *Wedding Night Report* (Hubert Frank, 1972), playing the lead with *Virgin Among the Living Dead*'s Christina Von Blanc as his bride. He's quite unabashed by nudity, which makes him a pleasing fit for Franco's films.

Monica Swinn remembers working on *Frauen Ohne Unschuld*, and although she didn't appear in the clinic scenes she was present at the location during filming. When I asked if she knew the glamorous but uncredited actress who plays bible-clutching blonde inmate Ruth, she couldn't remember her name, but she did recall this amusing event during the shoot: "I remember her because she had to play an ecstatic mystic. Jess had asked her to fall on her knees, to raise her arms to the sky shouting 'Apocalypse'. She did well, except she shouted 'Eucalyptus'. There was a general burst of laughter. We were

convulsing, we no longer dared look at each other we were laughing so much. She tried again, but each time the laughter exploded again. We nearly died. Eventually Jess changed the scene."¹

Look out too for Peter Baumgartner, a regular dp on the Franco-Dietrich films, who plays nice-guy Inspector Risi. Baumgartner's other screen appearances are rare, but you can see him at the bowling alley enjoying a few frames with director Erwin Dietrich himself in *Mädchen, die sich selbst bedienen* aka *Tempting Roommates* (1974) ... Just prior to *Frauen ohne Unschuld* Romay received her divorce papers: her marriage to Ramón Ardid was officially over. To mark the occasion she cut her hair very short for the film.

Music: The majority of Walter Baumgartner's music for *Frauen ohne Unschuld* is taken from *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst* (1968), Dietrich's second movie as director, but at least it wasn't used in the other Franco films. There's a catchy and amusing sax line for the main theme with some skilful variations on its melody elsewhere, including a version for acoustic guitar that complements the limpid beauty of the Lake Maggiore scenes. From time to time, music from *Jack the Ripper* reoccurs (for instance the scenes in the disused annex where Marguerita sees another patient murdered), indicating that Franco was aiming for something closer to a horror film than a sex film this time.

Locations: *Frauen ohne Unschuld* was shot at various beauty-spots on either side of the border between Switzerland and Italy. The principal location is Lake Maggiore, which stretches for 65km between the Italian regions of Piedmont and Lombardy and the Swiss canton of Ticino. The restaurant by the jetty, where Margerita first meets Sandra, is in the Italian town of Cannobio on the banks of Lake Maggiore. (It's now called the Caffè Sport; the Church of Santuario della Pietà can be seen in the background.) Carlo's house is in Lugano, a Swiss town near the border with Italy, overlooking nearby Lake Lugano from the North Bank. The country railway station where Margarita meets up with Sandra and her husband is in the Swiss town of Tegna, a few miles inland from the northern end of Lake Maggiore. The final shots of dwellings on the banks of Lake Maggiore were photographed not far from Tegna, in the Swiss lakeside town of Ascona. The clinic dormitory scenes were filmed at the same indoor location as the prison interiors from *Love Camp*, and the over-the-top mirrored bathroom from *Voodoo Passion* once again makes for some pleasing eye-candy (although someone has removed the giant ceramic leopard this time, which is a shame).

Connections: For another Franco film about an incarcerated young woman being hassled by her captors for information about missing jewels, see *Women Behind Bars* (1975).

Other versions: No variant versions of the film exist, and it appears to have been an uncontroversial title with regard to censorship. In fact, with just a single trim (the aforementioned pussy-lips) it could easily have played in the UK, so the fact it was never submitted perhaps means that Dietrich had probably grown tired of the prevailing censorship fuss around Franco's films and decided to give UK distribution the cold-shoulder.

WOMEN IN CELLBLOCK 9

(SWI/UK/US DVD title)

Switzerland, 1977

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Frauen für Zellen-Block 9 (SWI/WG) *Women for Cell-Block 9*

Alternative titles

Tropical Inferno (SWI video)

Flucht von der Todesinsel (SWI video) *Escape from Death Island*

Woman of Cellblock 9 (JAP video)

Kamp der Blanke Slavinnen (NL video) *Camp of the White Slaves*

Des Femmes pour le Bloc 9 (CAN video) *Women for Block 9*

Woman from Jail Dep. No 9 (WG 'Ascot' video)

Unconfirmed titles

Cellule 9 (FR alt.) *Cell 9*

Escape From Death Island (literal translation of SWI video title)

Esclaves de l'amour (Cinémathèque Française screening, 2008)

Production company

Elite Film (Zürich)

Theatrical distributor

Avis Filmverleih

Timeline

Shooting date	late autumn	1977
German 18-cert 49803 issued	07 March	1978
Germany	17 March	1978

Theatrical running time

Germany	75m00s
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Blu-ray running time

Ascot-Elite	77m47s
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director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. script: **Erwin C. Dietrich** [as 'Manfred Gregor']. director of photography: **Rudolf Küttel** [as 'Ruedi Küttel']. music: **Walter Baumgartner**. production manager: **Werner Zeindler**. line producer: **Erwin C. Dietrich**. An **Elite Film** Production. *Uncredited*: stills and Portuguese director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**.

Cast: **Susan Hemingway** (Maria, a student activist). **Karin Gambier** (Karen Laverne). **Howard Vernon** (Dr. Milton Costa). *Credited on Swiss pressbook*: **Aida Gouveia** [as Aida Gouvaia] (Aida Morgan). **Esther Studer** (Barbara Taylor). **Cesar Anahory**. *Uncredited*: **unknown actress** (Loba, the Chief Wardress). **Aida Vargas** (prisoner seen at dinner table). **Marius Clavier** (tin-helmeted soldier who assists in the torture of Barbara and Karen).

Synopsis: *Karen, Aida and Barbara, three women accused of a variety of crimes, are sent to a remote prison run by a sadistic warden called Loba, and her even crueller sidekick, Dr. Milton Costa. Soon the girls are joined in their suffering by a fourth victim, Maria, who has been kept in solitary confinement, deprived of food and drink. One by one, the women are taken for interrogation, until the last two survivors make a run for freedom...*

Review: *Women in Cellblock 9* is the darkest of Franco's WIP films. It is also very much a Dietrich production, with all of the stylistic restraint and clarity of production value we've come to expect from the previous ten films. It's shot, edited and scored very much in the Dietrich house style with almost no hand-held camerawork or zoom lensing, Dietrich having seemingly forbidden such reckless behaviour. With Franco's delirious stylistic tendencies held on a tight leash, it is to cruelty that we must turn for our fix. And this is a very cruel film.

Franco's WIP stories are rarely Sadean in the fullest sense – he spends too much time depicting the subjectivity of the captives for that. Though the sadists often win, there's a lot of dwelling upon the mind-set of the victim, an approach that respects conventional characterisation but detracts from Sade's relentless fixation on the philosophy of the libertine. By focussing on the attempted heroism of the captives and their determination to stand together and support each other (even, for instance, when injured parties slow down their escape attempts), the stories convey respect for the victims, something that never surfaces without the most withering sarcasm in De Sade. One could argue that the 'unhappy endings' of Franco's WIP films demonstrate the Sadean contempt for the virtuous; if they'd been more selfish maybe they would have survived. Yet the sheer amount of screen time devoted to the anxieties of the victims tends to ennoble their struggles and blunt the Sadean edge.

That said, *Women in Cellblock 9* offers a portrait of two of the nastiest, most genuinely Sadean libertines of the Dietrich era: the wardress, Loba, and the camp's monstrous 'doctor', Milton Costa, played by Franco mainstay Howard Vernon (his only role in a Dietrich production). The sticky centre of the film is a harrowing three-part torture sequence in which the leading ladies are marched off, one by one, to be abused and assaulted by this monstrous pair. Costa is an outstanding creation; a truly depraved mean-spirited bastard in whom brutality and cynicism have run riot. We hear that he's recently been forced into lowered circumstances, which suggests that on top of his customary cruelty he's taking revenge for social humiliation. "*Things are finally going my way,*" he smirks, as he returns to the camp with a lorry-full of victims; surely the most subtly chilling line spoken by a villain in a WIP drama. Dressed shabbily in a worn-out suit, he proudly declares that despite his recent poverty he never sold his collection of torture implements, which he carries with him in three black hold-alls. As Loba offers champagne to a girl dying of thirst, he pours salt into the glass before letting the victim drink, a cruel refinement that conveys

much without the need for gaping flesh-wounds. Even on the English dubbing track, which seems determined to make everyone in the film sound like an idiot, the character's malicious pleasure in cruelty shines like a freshly polished scalpel. Loba too is the epitome of Sadean malice; there's a controlled epicurean mockery in her expression that rings pitch-perfect as she watches the suffering of her victims. "Aaah, I like these sentimental stories. Do go on!" she sneers, as one poor girl tries to beg her way out of trouble. It's really a crime that the actress playing Loba goes uncredited, and remains unknown: she gives one of the best performances ever to grace a Franco movie.

The torture scenes gain cumulative intensity by being bunched together. Instead of spacing out the brutality and letting the audience get their bearings, Franco compresses all of the nastiness into a fifteen minute sequence that slowly sucks you into the villains' Sadean world. Two smirking, leering sadists, taunting and cajoling victims for information they really don't give a rat's ass about. They admit to each other that it's the 'work' that matters, not the results; they're like artists congratulating each other on refusing to sell out. When Loba tells Milton she must travel to the city to convey the information gleaned through their torture sessions, he declines to come along; he's simply not interested in the 'administrative' side. All he cares about is torture. That's not to say the cruelty is as graphic and explicit as the depredations in films such as Joel M. Reed's *Bloodsucking Freaks*, Don Edmonds's *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* or Luigi Batzella's *The Beast in Heat*. This is a Franco film after all, and he rarely goes to town with the gore. Nevertheless, the acting, the close-ups of sweating screaming faces, the sneering of the torturers and the relentless aura of cruelty go a long way towards making this as memorably nasty as anything produced in the exploitation field.

Was it Franco's final word on the subject? Well strictly speaking no, because he made two more WIP films later in his career (*Sadomania* in 1980 and *Furia en el trópico* in 1983), but *Women in Cellblock 9* was the last one he made for Erwin Dietrich, so it's tempting to read it as a summary and condensation of the period. The scenario is, if anything, even more minimal and stripped down than *Barbed Wire Dolls*. 'Cell-Block 9' is a single room in a stone outhouse; on the door is a home-made sign with the number '9' scrawled on it! Talk about government cuts... The girls are shackled from the ceiling by their necks and their conversations are similarly throttled, dwelling only on the fretful anticipation of agonies to come. There's none of the usual comic-strip characterisation: no power-struggles between inmates, no prison snitch running off to the bosses with information about the others, and no predatory lesbian taking a proprietorial interest in the new arrivals. The focus is solely on whether the girls can survive what awaits them.

The downside of bunching all the nasty stuff into one extended sequence is an uneventful last reel. The survivors' escape is very much by-the-numbers, and Franco's disinterest is plain. A scene involving alligators attacking the fugitives as they swim across a lake is wearily directed and blatantly padded, as well as displaying

the typical mismatch between stock-footage and location shooting that always plagues this sort of thing. And while it's customary in Franco's WIP films for the ending to be downbeat, the perfunctory way in which the characters meet their fates here is astonishing: it's either a blunt affirmation of Franco's principled insistence on grim outcomes for grim stories, or a demonstration of his utter boredom with the whole concept. Taken as a whole, what Franco seems to be saying in *Women in Cellblock 9* is that there's nothing of importance to this genre except sadistic depictions of torture and abuse. Detailed plotting, characterisation, niceties of pacing and structure, political implications, real world parallels, all can be rejected. Franco pulls the last flimsy veils of filmmaking propriety aside and reveals that all these films have ever been about is the excitement of watching someone suffer. Everything else is an afterthought: a limp sprig of garnish on the side of the plate.

Women in Cellblock 9 is now available on Blu-ray in a glowing transfer revealing its sumptuous photographic technical merits. Gone are the days when grubby video transfers matched the scuzzy vibe of the stories. We can now see that the film was always intended to look immaculate. I have some sympathy for the idea that sleazy films feel even scuzzier when seen on degenerated video: that is, after all, how I first saw many such titles. Far from spoiling the fun, however, I find that a pristine presentation of a film like this is actually more disorientating – seldom can a film so unpleasant in theme have looked so sunny and smart and easy on the eye. Franco felt that the best of his Dietrich productions were *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and *Jack the Ripper*, both of which were far more complex productions with greater onscreen production values. Nevertheless, the frank aura of wickedness and sadism that boils within *Women in Cellblock 9* makes it memorable for reasons that have nothing to do with money.

Cast and Crew: On his commentary track for *Jack the Ripper* Erwin Dietrich asserted that Esther Studer later disliked her Jess Franco films: "Esther Studer is an actress from Basel. She was very talented. In time she got tired of being shown naked again and again in my films. She went to court in Basel to stop the distribution of those films. Of course this is not possible, because the films were sold worldwide. The judge agreed with me. It's like Hildegard Knef, who is often asked about her early nude roles, once said: "The shame persists, the money is gone". I feel sorry for Esther Studer. I like her a lot and we got along very well. But to some degree my movies are historic documents, they are part of my property and the public and I have a right to see the films time and again."¹ ... Franco was pleased with both his director of photography and his lead actor, as he told Marian D. Botulino: "Rudi Kuettel was not quite as strict in lighting and camera work as Baumgartner, so the film has a slightly more realistic look. Howard Vernon played his role incredibly well, I love his interpretation."²

Music: As per usual for a Dietrich production, the music cues are bereft of Franco's ear for the avant garde, tending either to cod-muscular horn-and-percussion arrangements reminiscent of old war movies, or cheesy-cute porno tracks lacking Franco's off-centre sensibility (an occasional burst of strings from *Love Letters*



TOP: Barbara (Esther Studer) meets Loba the Wardress (actress unknown), one of Franco's most believably Sadean women.
 Dr. Milton Costa (Howard Vernon) and Loba, assisted by their chief guard (Marius Clavier), prepare to torture Karen
 Dr. Milton Costa, a down-on-his-luck sadist in search of the good old days – played brilliantly by Howard Vernon.

of a Portuguese Nun turns up to add a touch of 'class', possibly the only irony Franco could inject). Certain library cues feel like they've wandered in from an episode of *Hogan's Heroes* (a series which, amusingly, is forever linked to the WIP genre because *Ilsa, she Wolf of the SS* was shot on its standing sets).

Locations: Portuguese parkland and tropical shrubbery in the grounds of the Palacio de Monserrate in Sintra.

UK theatrical release: *Frauen für Zellen-Block 9* was never submitted for UK cinema release, but was finally put forward for DVD by Anchor Bay in 2004, when it met with outright rejection by the BBFC. Their judgement raised the usual concerns about eroticised violence as well as citing the age of Susan Hemingway (sixteen). Under British law, although the age of consent is 16, one may not take part in pornographic activities until 18 years of age; therefore the film would be found in breach of law if released here. BBFC records state: "*The film was rejected for a DVD certificate in February 2004 in the United Kingdom by the BBFC over sexual violence being eroticised, and indecent images of an under-eighteen (in Britain, indecent images of children are illegal).*"³ The BBFC website has this to say about the film: "*This work was rejected. Under the Video Recordings Act 1984, the Board is required to consider any harmful effect that a video work may have upon potential viewers or, through their behaviour, to society by the manner in which it deals with (amongst other things) violent behaviour, horrific behaviour and human sexual activity. Women in Cellblock 9 contains many sequences depicting the abuse, torture and humiliation of naked women. These sequences were found to be in conflict with the Board's published classification guidelines, which prohibit scenes that eroticise or endorse sexual assault. The Board's strict stance on titillatory sexual violence is supported both by public opinion and by a large body of media effects research. In addition, The Protection of Children Act, as amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2003, makes the distribution and showing of indecent photographs of a child under the age of 18 a criminal offence. One of the lead actresses in Women in Cellblock 9 was just over 16 at the time the film was made. The Board was in no doubt that many of the sexualised scenes involving her would therefore be illegal. Although the amendment will not take effect until May 2004, the BBFC cannot classify material which would be in circulation in breach of the Act. The Board considered the option of cutting the work. However, the quantity of scenes involving eroticised sexual violence, combined with the indecent photographs of a person under 18, meant that cuts were not a viable option.*"

Connections: The seventh in a chain of WIP films from Franco which began with *99 Women*, this once again takes place in a fictional South American country in which the rulers of a rogue detention-camp enjoy the degradation of their prisoners. In a calculated move by Franco which refuses political alignment, the camps in all these films are run by people who maintain absolute control regardless of the government of the day. There's a temptation to advance a political reading of the Franco WIP films, with reference to General Franco and Spanish involvement in South America, but in truth the films have little of substance to say about Spanish or Latin American politics. Some may describe the cynical approach that

Franco takes in these films (a succession of impotent resistance groups, faceless changes of government, and 'kettles calling the pot') as calculatedly anarchistic. In fact, one could more effectively argue that Franco's WIP films are inherently conservative because they rarely allow for the possibility of enlightened resistance, political change, or meaningful revolution. It's a short hop from saying that all sides are equally corrupt to sitting back and letting the forces of oppression get on with it. Ultimately, however, global politics are not uppermost in Franco's mind in these films. It's just that with palm trees and lush foliage, Spain and neighbouring Portugal can be made to stand in for the entire South American continent, which for him becomes a sweltering, sexualised continent of the mind ... The name Milton Costa was previously used for Paul Müller's character in *Barbed Wire Dolls*.

Other versions: None. The film should not be confused with *Women in Cell Block 7*, which is the American retitling of Rino di Silvestro's 1973 WIP caper, *Diario segreto da un carcere femminile*.

COCKTAIL SPÉCIAL

(French theatrical title)

France, 1978

French visa no: 48877

Alternative titles

Feuchte Lippen (WG theatrical) *Wet Lips*

Fuktiga Läppar (SWE video) *Wet Lips*

Le goût du sperme (shooting title) *The Taste of Sperm*

Wet Lips (SWE video from 'Beate Ushe/Videorama')

Wit Lips (sic) (IT video)

Unconfirmed titles

Tu me feras tout [title refused] *You Will Give Me Everything*

Copulations [title refused]

Oral Total

Sex Cocktail (USA?)

Production company

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date	early	1978
Paris	05 July	1978
French visa issued	11 August	1978
Germany	06 July	1979

Theatrical running time

France 72m (Bier: 75m)

Video and DVD running times (converted)

FR Prosperine SECAM VHS	67m06s
GER Beate Ushe/Videorama PAL VHS	73m50s
SWE 'Videorama' PAL VHS	73m50s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. writer: **Jess Franco** [as 'Robert Hughe']. adaptation: **Jess Franco** [as 'Robert Hughe'], **Lucette Gaudiot**. producer: **Robert De Nesle**. director of photography/camera operator: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. dubbing: **Studios Marcadet**. laboratory: **C.T.M. Gennevilliers**. Kodak Eastmancolor. Produced by **Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris).

Cast: **Beni Toux** [as 'Toux'] (Eugénie Raspe [IT video cover: Eugénie De Havilland]). **Karine Gambier** (Sandra). **Nicole Velna** (Anna, Berto's wife). **Aida Vargas** (Martine de Bressac [IT video cover: Martina Da Costa], a writer). *Uncredited:* **Marius Clavier** (Berto, Martine's servant). **Mel Rodrigo** (Christian de Bressac, Martine's brother). *Bier adds:* **Jean Perrat** (Raymond Raspe, Eugénie's father). *IMDb adds:* Yves Laporte. Caroline Mainard. *Note:* IMDb also adds Lina Romay (Martine). This is incorrect. Romay does not appear in the film.

Synopsis: *Naïve Eugénie is invited by her father's dominatrix lover, the perverse novelist Martine De Bressac, to spend a weekend at her country home. There she meets Berto and Anna, a married couple who act as Martine's servants and sexual partners. After initiating her into the ways of libertinage with a sacramental cocktail of wine, urine and sperm, Martine makes Eugénie 'guest of honour' at a masked orgy, with the aim of tricking the girl's father into unwittingly deflowering his daughter...*

Production notes: Some time around Christmas 1977, Franco cut his professional ties with producer Erwin C. Dietrich and left Switzerland for Paris. His reasons for doing so, expressed in interviews years later, varied according to who was asking. He once claimed that he quit working for Dietrich and returned to Paris because he missed the excitement of metropolitan living, having tired of the sleepy suburbs of Zürich. However, when I spoke to him in person in 2010 he told me a different story: *"The problem with Dietrich was, I was working every day, and I was very happy, because he wanted to use me as a means to have a director sitting in front of him, making films for him, and he was very happy about it. But then when the industry prospects started to be less certain for small films he wanted me to make less films, a couple of films a year. Immediately I realised that it was better for me to go, because the chance to work as I like was over."*¹

Franco said he was happy working for Dietrich, and he was certainly pleased to have regular financial backing. But Franco never expressed dissatisfaction with the restrictiveness of his tenure

as Dietrich's house director: casting, scoring and camera-handling, for instance. We now know, of course, why Franco never wanted to open that particular can of worms in an interview. Perhaps the real reason for his departure from Dietrich was simply that he had paid off his debts, finished his obligations, and was now free to seek other work.

In the aftermath of his Swiss adventure, however, Franco stumbled for a while. Back to hustling for finance, he turned to an old compadré, Robert De Nesle, and his company Comptoir Français du Film Production (CFFP). De Nesle had produced many of Franco's best films of the early 1970s, including *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*, *How to Seduce a Virgin* and *Countess Perverse*. However, De Nesle's financial resources – never very robust – had dwindled even further during the intervening three years: the trio of films Franco would make for CFFP in the early months of 1978 were among his cheapest yet. *Elles font tout*, *Je brûle de partout* and *Cocktail spécial* were rattled off in less than four weeks, which in itself was no different to the way in which he shot films like *How to Seduce a Virgin* (1973), *Countess Perverse* (1973) or *The Lustful Amazon* (1973). The difference this time was commitment, or lack of it. *Cocktail spécial* and *Elles font tout* are two of the weakest Franco films of the 1970s, and while *Je brûle de partout* has some of the strange sick atmosphere one associates with Franco's better work, the overall feeling one gets from these productions is one of listlessness and exhaustion. Whether the tiredness was brought on by the workload of the past three years, depression in the face of poor financing, or the dispiriting feeling of going backwards rather than forwards professionally, is unclear, but something was definitely wrong. As Franco himself said to me in 2010, *"This [work] was all shit. I never signed those films, I never wanted to sign those films. I had to do them because I was completely broke."*²

Let's just stop and think about that statement for a moment. After a stable working arrangement in Switzerland, directing sixteen films in three years, Franco nevertheless found himself "completely broke" upon returning to France! How could this happen? Either he had no idea how to invest his earnings, or else the Dietrich period really was about paying off debts, rather than making new money. Franco was by all accounts a bon-viveur and a generous host, who wine and dined his cast and crew at the best restaurants, but it still seems remarkable to be penniless after shooting sixteen films in three years for a scrupulously honest producer. Which is why it seems more likely that the reason he ended up broke, making films for Robert De Nesle that he really didn't want to make, is that he'd spent the last two years working off debts...

Review: *Cocktail spécial* draws from the same well of inspiration as 1969's *Eugénie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (namely the Marquis De Sade's book *Philosophy in the Bedroom*), but although it delivers for its all-important cocktail sequence a bucket of bodily fluids of which the Marquis might have approved, for the most

part the running time is awash with floppy penises, grimy-looking pussies and lacklustre penetrations. The sex on display is entirely unremarkable, the music (most of it familiar from other Franco films) is flung over the images with no consideration or subtlety, and the brevity of what takes place between the hardcore scenes tells you all you need to know about the value Franco put upon it. Whereas sexually explicit films like *Shining Sex* or *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray* have a mesmeric, magical quality that speaks of life beyond the sleaze-pit circuit, *Cocktail spécial* is lost in the crowd of thousands of similar titles, and were it not for a small handful of signature Franco touches – the theme of incest, the coastal setting, the name ‘Eugénie’, an occasional zoom into a vagina – the film would be indistinguishable from the films of Alain Payet or any of the other porno also-rans of the day.

The action begins with a telephone-sex scene as kinky novelist Martine De Bressac calls the virginal young Eugénie, inviting her to visit for an education in the ways of love. While talking, Martine amuses herself sexually with her married live-in servants, Berto and Anna, giving Eugénie an earful as a preview. *Cocktail spécial*’s version of innocence is merely a lack of hands-on experience; Eugénie’s already gagging for it, and fingers herself to a climax while listening. It should be noted, however, that this tallies more closely with De Sade’s original story than Franco’s earlier adaptation *Eugénie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*. In the book, Eugénie is an avid pupil, chomping at the bit for new experiences. While being schooled in libertinage by the Sadean mouthpiece character, Dolmance, she raises token demurrals but then swiftly withdraws her objections in line with the philosophy of the libertine. In the earlier film Franco painted her as a victim, an innocent, tricked and manipulated into murder and vice: more like Sade’s eternal victim Justine than his acolyte in wickedness Eugénie. It’s just a pity that the actor playing Eugénie, Beni Toux, is among the least expressive of Franco’s leading ladies, and besides, the amorality which emerges in the book’s heroine is never properly explored here, except for a flip coda which we’ll discuss later.

At home, Eugénie’s father Raymond chastises her for walking around the house nude, then heads off to a hotel for kinky sex with Martine. After a little S&M (and the threat of having his masochistic nature revealed in Martine’s next book), Raymond agrees to allow Martine free access to his daughter, and that’s the plot pretty much done with. Instead of further developments exploring the cruel jouissance of De Sade’s philosophy, ennui seems to dominate the film; the morning after a night of S&M ravishment, our ingenue walks into the sitting room to find everyone still writhing around nude on the floor, and the feeling is one of ‘been-there done-that’ boredom; this, from a girl who has only just experienced sex! Eugénie ends up joining in anyway, but her body language speaks of weariness, not arousal. Some psychic force, emanating perhaps from behind the camera, is weakening the elemental energy of sex, earthing the current and sending invisible waves of lassitude across the space between camera and flesh.

On the plus side, the ‘special cocktail’ of the title is memorably repulsive (or exciting, depending on your tolerance for steaming bodily fluids), and Franco at least manages to make this key scene visually interesting, as the cocktail is dispensed in a room full of party guests while the space is carved up into quarters by camera lens flare. I also have to hand it to Martine; as a writer she really knows how to grab her readers’ attention. Her latest novel shows her, on the back cover, with legs spread wide to expose her moist pussy. Beat that, Jackie Collins... The red-hued orgy scene, with droopy dejected penises rubbed against joke-store masks, and women trying to conduct oral sex through mouth slits a centimetre wide, is either utterly stupid or oddly dreamlike, depending on how tolerant you’re feeling. All that remains is for Martine to pull off her pièce-de-résistance, tricking father and daughter into a steamy clinch, and we’re set for an explosive finale...

Or so you would think. Instead, in keeping with the general lassitude, Franco handles the revelation with the dramatic equivalent of a shrug. Eugénie yelps, “Daddy!” and Raymond exclaims, “Eugénie! It’s you!” upon which she smiles and resumes blowing him. The father’s further responses, for or against, are simply not recorded, perhaps the most extreme example of directorial disinterest Franco ever committed to celluloid. Languid and soporific, the film has just a drop of that lazy decadence familiar from the more intoxicating Franco films of the 1970s, but let’s face it: this time someone’s pissed in the absinthe. The thrills are massively watered down, the sexual charge is negligible, and Franco signally fails to deliver a worthwhile new spin on the source material.

Cast and crew: The presence of Lisbon-based dancer Aida Vargas in most of the films Franco shot in Portugal between 1976-1978 (*Die Sklavinnen*, *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, *Elles font tout*, *Je brûle de partout*) suggests that maybe she was responsible for recruiting the other Portuguese cast members, drawing on her contacts in the local arts or possibly from her retinue of personal friends ... Marius Clavier, who plays Berto, Martine’s servant, appeared in a small supporting role in *Women in Cellblock 9*, playing a guard ‘helping out’ with the torture of the female prisoners. He can also be seen in the other two CFFP productions, *Elles font tout* and *Je brûle de partout*.

Music: The best way to hear Franco’s intended soundtrack for *Cocktail spécial* is to watch the Swedish video, which retains all except the French credits and has better sound and vision quality. Among the cues is a catchy little number by Daniel White built around the repeated chant “The taste taste taste taste taste of your sperm!” Given White’s generally more decorous character, one imagines that it was Franco who wrote the lyrical refrain for this song. If things had gone according to plan, it would have been the title theme: Franco had originally wanted to call the film *Le goût du sperme* (“The Taste of Sperm”) until the title was vetoed by the French censor. Also on hand here is an unreleased theme by White, mixing Catholic choral and synth-disco music. Franco obviously loved it, because he used it over and over again in the 1980s. Two

other Daniel White tracks, both of which would end up as title themes in the 1980s, are also unveiled here for the first time: a bluesy sax number called “Oceano Nox” (as it was called on the 1984 library music compilation *Mood Selection Ambiance Volume 1*) which provided the title themes for *El lago de las virgenes* (1981) and *Sangre en mis zapatos* (1983), and a rather drab little rinky-dink bordello piece that wound up on the opening credits for *El hotel de los ligues* (1982) ... The Italian version of the film is the same length as the German release, but it redubs the dialogue and changes the soundtrack completely, adding unlicensed music such as The Temptations’ “Papa Was a Rolling Stone” and Pink Floyd’s “Shine On You Crazy Diamond” to the sex scenes! (Pink Floyd were the bootleggers’ house band for porn soundtracks in the 1970s; their albums were plundered by both European and American hardcore directors, including *Forced Entry* auteur Sean Costello who must have really dug their *Ummagumma* album as he stole from it time and time again.) The Italian version also adds some David Sanborn-esque sax soloing, of the kind that accompanies softcore sexiness in mainstream movies but sounds jarringly out of place in a Jess Franco film!

Locations: All of the action takes place at the Farol Hotel in Cascais, Portugal. Still open for business today, and looking much the same except for some redevelopment of the surrounding grounds, it’s just a five minute walk away from the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães, as used in numerous Franco films including *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*. The same hotel also provides the setting for Franco’s next two films, *Elles font tout* and *Je brûle de partout*.

Connections: As noted, *Cocktail spécial* is a riff on Franco’s *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (with Aida Vargas and Mel Rodrigo in the parts played by Maria Röhm and Jack Taylor, and Beni Touxa in the Maria Liljedahl role), and thus another adaptation of The Marquis De Sade’s *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. But while the incest angle and the ‘cocktail’ itself may be authentically Sadean, the lack of development or interesting dialogue makes for an insubstantial skim across the surface of the writer’s ideas ... Incest made its first unambiguous appearance in a Franco film in *Eugenie* (1970), but in that film it was only referred to in the dialogue. Incestuous rape between uncle and niece takes place in *A Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1971); very sketchily implied incestuous rape lurks in the family background of *Al otro lado del espejo* (1973); abusive sex between half-sisters, one of them retarded, occurs in *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973); and there’s a flashback scene depicting a father’s attempted rape of his daughter in *Frauengefängnis* (1975). *Satanic Sisters* appears at first to hinge around a sexual relationship between two sisters but they are eventually revealed to be stepsisters. It’s only here, in *Cocktail spécial*, that Franco stages an explicit sexual encounter between father and daughter, and it’s the result of malicious subterfuge. Having brought his characters unwittingly to this taboo-busting act, he then jettisons any plausible sense of characterisation and has them carry on having sex together as if unconcerned. It’s a

crazy decision. Franco transgresses one of society’s oldest taboos and then, when the cat is out of the bag so to speak, shrugs off the repercussions like it’s nothing of importance. It’s not even treated as a joke; the drama of the moment is simply thrown away. He would return to the topic of incest again, with a fully loaded comedy blunderbuss, in 1987’s riotously disgusting *Phalo Crest* ... The striking Aida Vargas, playing the manipulative Martine, was a ‘sister of indulgence’ in *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and the sinister secretary of blackmailed industrialist Amos Radeck in *Die Sklavinnen* ... *Cocktail spécial* breaks the Sadean mould with a dark-skinned Eugénie this time round, although her race plays no significant part in the actual story.

French theatrical release: *Cocktail spécial* spent a mere fortnight on release in Paris, opening on 5 July 1978 on five screens (Cine Halles; Axis; Cinevog Saint-Lazare, Brooklyn; Cinevog Montparnasse). It pulled in a modest 8770 viewers over the two weeks, after which it disappeared for a while before turning up for bookings in February 1979 and again in August 1982 (double billed with an earlier Franco-De Nesle title, *Les Chatouilleuses*).

Other versions: *Cocktail spécial*’s sole manifestation on French video came from a company called Proserpine Editions, and it was highly unsatisfactory. At around fifty-eight minutes the film appears to end, with a frolic on the beach and a camera-zoom into the sunlight. Then, after a brief glimpse of a Proserpine trailer card, we return to the film, although we’ve jumped forward in the narrative and the picture quality is even worse than before. The scene to which we return is the sex party, at which Eugénie’s father is tricked into having sex with his daughter, but you’d never guess because the saturated lighting of the scene plays havoc with the video’s already atrocious duplication quality. To make matters worse, the last minute is a garbled mess of truncated shots, interrupted dialogue and rudely edited music. Quite what happened at the video transfer stage is anyone’s guess! Fortunately, the version released on video in Germany as *Feuchte Lippen* is far superior. The whole film is present, except for the French credits, and one can actually make out the identities of the participants in the orgy! This version (distributed by German war heroine turned pornography pioneer Beate Uhse) went on to be released in Sweden as *Fuktiga Läppar*, although the screen credits retain the German-language title. In Italy the film hit video stores with the bizarre title *Wit Lips* on the cover: the video itself contained the *Feuchte Lippen* version dubbed into Italian, with the German title card still present ... *Cocktail spécial* is not to be confused with *Cocktail porno*, another CFFP porno film, made by Alain Payet the year before. One should also beware of a second Swedish release called *Feuchte Lippen* (which is in fact *Flossie*, starring Marie Forså and directed by Mac Ahlberg in 1974). There’s another *Feuchte Lippen* too, directed in 2008 by Harry S. Morgan, starring Vivian Schmitt. Finally, I really don’t recommend doing a Google image search for *Cocktail spécial* under its unconfirmed alternative title *Oral Total*: not unless you like your pornography liberally mixed with dental surgery...

ELLES FONT TOUT

(French theatrical title) *They Do Everything*

France, 1978

French visa no: 48955

Alternative titles

Quel certo sapore (IT theatrical) *That Certain Flavour*
Ze Doen Alles! (BEL theatrical – Dutch lang) *They Do Everything!*
Mach's nochmal Baby (GER theatrical) *Do it again baby*
L'hôtel des suceuses (FR video) *Blowjob Hotel*
Des Filles à tout faire (shooting title) *Girls of All Trades*
Nini la fesse (alt. shooting title) *Nini the Spanker*

Unconfirmed titles

Quel certo piacere (IT alt.) *That Certain Pleasure*

Production company

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date	early	1978
French visa issued ('X' cert)	28 November	1978
Paris	31 January	1979
Nantes (France)	14 February	1979
Germany	circa	1979
Bari (Italy)	19 December	1983
Rome	02 April	1986

Theatrical running time

France	81m
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Video and DVD running times (converted)

IT 'Cine Video Sud' PAL VHS	76m55s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. writers: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown'], **Robert De Nesle** [as 'Robert Hughe']. dialogue: **Lucette Gaudiot**. producer: **Robert De Nesle**. director of photography/camera operator: **Jess Franco** [as 'Alain Hardy']. music: **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. editor: **Claude Gros**. production manager: **Jacques Garcia**. dubbing: **Studios Marcadet**. laboratory: **C.T.M. Gennevilliers**. Kodak Eastmancolor. Produced by **Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris).

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Nini la fesse, a porno star). **Martine Fléty** (Sarah). **Didier Aubriot** (Monsieur Eric Dupont). **Aida Vargas** (Fatima, the receptionist). **Marius Clavier** (Abdul, the hotel

manservant). **Susan Hemingway** (Nannette; [IT: Nene]). **Mel Rodrigo** (Monsieur Carlo Duras [IT: Coco]). Bier adds: **Beni Touxa**.

Synopsis (taken from Quel certo sapore): Eric DuPont and his neighbour, Sarah, unwittingly reply to each other's contact ads. She's seeking "a well-hung man." DuPont's reply claims that he's well endowed and "a tireless lover". They exchange photos of their genitalia and agree to spend the weekend at the "Hotel of Free Pleasures". When they see each other at the hotel (which is staffed by Fatima, the receptionist and Abdul, the bellboy) neither of them is disappointed. Meanwhile, in another room, a woman called Sado is unpacking sex aids from a suitcase while her partner, Carlo Duras, gets changed. Tatin and Nene – newlyweds on their honeymoon – have also booked into the hotel. Tatin is embarrassed to come out of the bathroom naked. His mother told him that marriages must only be consummated at night. Nene asks if she can at least have something "in advance". He finally confesses that he's a virgin. DuPont and his neighbour undress. She says: "This isn't the dick in the photo." He replies: "That was my friend's. But don't worry, when it becomes more confident it turns into a beast!" The second couple are getting ready to have sex: Carlo says, "I hope this works, I'm tired of men." Sado says, "Me too. Don't worry, you're beautiful and sweet like a woman. You really turn me on." Carlo returns the compliment: "You're strong and muscular, just like a man." The married couple are also having oral sex. Abdul and Fatima are spying through the keyhole. Meanwhile, DuPont and Sarah are arguing because she called his penis "my little worm". She then calls him "my big Negro", but he gets annoyed and tells her to stop teasing him. Next morning, the men introduce themselves at breakfast. The women all take breakfast in their rooms. Sado gives Abdul a blow job when he takes in her tray. When he takes breakfast for Sarah, she gives him a blow job too. When he takes Nene her breakfast, he enters the room with his penis already out. She's furious and makes a scene. Back downstairs, DuPont Carlo and Tatin are talking when they're stopped in their tracks by the arrival of a voluptuous woman. They go upstairs and spy on her through the keyhole as she muses whether to insert a vibrator "in the pussy or the ass?" Meanwhile, Sado and Nene are sunbathing on the terrace. They end up in bed together, but rush to the keyhole when they hear a noise from the next room. The woman we saw arrive earlier is still playing with her vibrator. The girls continue having sex. Carlo joins them, but Nene says her husband is jealous. Carlo tells her that Tatin is a hunk – he's seen him playing tennis. At the tennis court, the voluptuous woman distracts DuPont and Tatin as she rehearses explicit lines from a script. She really puts DuPont off his game when she throws herself against the fence and yells: "In my mouth! Let me suck it and drink your sperm... Stay in my pussy, dear..." Later, Tatin joins Nene, Carlo and Sado in the bedroom for a group sex session. During the orgy, Tatin comes in Sado's mouth and she immediately French kisses his wife. Tatin comments: "What filth!" Nene then kisses Carlo, causing her husband to remark, "Nauseating!" Further down the corridor, DuPont is finding it hard to keep up with his neighbour's sexual appetite. The voluptuous woman is doing a crossword puzzle in her room. The clue is "self service": her answer is "masturbation". She discovers Abdul and Fatima spying



on her and starts to perform oral sex on them. The problem is that she just can't decide whether she prefers dick or pussy. She eventually reveals her true identity: Nini, the famous porno star. She is studying the script for her next movie – a porno musical with which she's hoping to win the "Golden Blow Job" award. Abdul says it's his dream to make love with her. Next morning, all the guests want breakfast in their rooms. Abdul tells Fatima to take up the trays. DuPont accosts her from behind, rubbing himself against her. Carlo wants cream in his coffee, so she jerks him off into the cup. She gets the biggest shock, however, from Tatin: when she enters with the tray and asks him "Where do you want it?", he simply says, "On the table, please." In her room, Nini is rehearsing a scene in which she's supposed to be dying of thirst. She notices the men spying on her, drags them into the room, pulls down their trousers, lies on the floor and asks: "Who'll quench my thirst?" Later on, the three girls see the drained men leaving Nini's room. The exhausted husbands go to the hotel bar, where DuPont tires them out even more with his repertoire of parrot jokes. Everyone goes to bed, but the three men all end up back in the bar saying they can't sleep. It turns out that the women won't let them back into their rooms. In the meantime, the ladies sneak into Nini's room to teach her a lesson. However, she's pleased to see them: "You finally decided to come!" At lunch the next day, Nini crawls under the tables and fellates the men. That night, Nini resolves the couple's differences by creeping into their rooms and arousing them as they sleep. They wake up and make love to each other. Her work done, Nini leaves the hotel. [Thanks to Mark Thompson Ashworth for this detailed synopsis.]

Review: Jess Franco joins the porno riff-raff with this thoroughly banal sex film. *Elles font tout* has not one iota of visual or narrative imagination, and instead taxes the patience with tedious couplings and 'cheeky' comedy. It's relentlessly straightforward, utterly unambitious, and really quite irritating. A dab of mild flagellation and some even milder female domination will surely fail to push anyone's meters into the red, while actors come across as dim smudges of themselves, acting out prosaic sex-comedy tropes without a flicker of genuine passion. Susan Hemingway essays the first of two consecutive roles for Franco, although her character here is much less interesting than her daughter of a sex-trafficker in *Je brûle de partout*. Here she drifts through various comedy set-ups involving a dumb schmuck husband who doesn't know how to please a woman. Nor for that matter does she know how to teach him; her idea of taking the problem in hand is to count metronomically like the speaking clock, while he pumps away on top of her. Lina Romay tries to enliven proceedings as 'Nini', a porno actress on holiday who educates the three uptight couples in the ways of love, but her chances of starring celestial in such a limited firmament are impeded by Franco's vacationing inspiration.

Something that acts against the film, if you try to take it seriously, is the way it adopts a relentlessly heteronormative point of view. There are two marital 'problems' that require attention from Nini: the first is male impotence (a perennial problem in Franco hardcores); the second is the preference of one male character, Carlo Duras (Mel Rodrigo), for the passive role in bed.

We see him fellating his girlfriend's strap-on while she whips him, an arrangement that we conclude is not to the woman's satisfaction as she looks thoroughly bored. "I hope this works, I'm tired of men," says Carlo, introducing a notion repeated several times in later Franco films, of a gay man being 'turned straight'. The couple's sadomasochistic sex games suggest that it's going to take more than the missionary position to satisfy Carlo, but Franco isn't prepared to leave it there: the arrangement has to be 'fixed' so that the couple can have 'normal' sex. What an odd petit-bourgeois attitude this is! Does Franco really expect Carlo to stop being an S&M 'freak' and settle for the missionary position? That the couple in question might learn to enjoy the sub-dom games they play seems not to occur to him; instead, with that relentless jolliness that afflicts all of Franco's sex comedies, Nini must 'cure' fey sapling Carlo so that he can do it 'properly'. It's not going too far to say that this prescriptive attitude takes precedence over everything else; the climax of the story, six minutes long, involves Nini sucking Carlo's penis while he sleeps, and then inserting the tenuously erect member into his sleeping wife's pussy. "Well done," purrs Romay. The cart is steered back onto the narrow path of conformity. With this dubious service completed, Romay flounces off down the hotel corridor and the film abruptly ends.

Libidinal conservatism isn't the only problem. What really lets things down is the lackadaisical way Franco trudges through his minuscule scenario. As if taking a cue from the limp-dicked male cast, *Elles font tout* suffers from a lack of erectile energy. Even bearing in mind the small rewards which Franco fanatics are accustomed to in his lesser work, there's precious little nourishment here. The fault may lie with Comptoir boss Robert De Nesle, who cooked up the story idea (he's credited as 'Robert Hughe'). Rumour has it that he came up with the story over coffee with Eurociné boss Marius Lesoeur, when the two men found themselves discussing the idea of working with Franco again. During the meeting De Nesle concocted the basic outline for *Elles font tout*, while Lesoeur scribbled down the superficially similar *Eros Hotel* (made by Sergio Bergonzelli in 1979).

Working from De Nesle's less than scintillating storyline, Franco crams all of his inventiveness into the dialogue, which is packed with lines of utter daftness. Playing with a vibrator, a woman cries, "Oh, magic banana! Splendid magnetic banana! I adore your powerful form, symbol of great power! [...] There's nothing better than exotic fruit to make you come properly!" Nini the porno actress rehearses a scene which requires her to scream, "Give it to me from the front, from behind! Stick it in my ear, everywhere!" And during a blow job, the bisexual Carlo tells his new girlfriend Sado: "You suck just like my first love, the village policeman. He was the only one who could make me come." However, there's also a rather shocking tinge of racism to the banter. When the dark-skinned Portuguese/North African waiter Abdul (Marius Clavier) takes breakfast to one female guest, she offers him a blow job, saying, "Come here, little gorilla!", and during the sex act itself she chunters, "It's exotic, like making love with a chimp!" In Franco's defence, I think the woman is meant to sound

ridiculous, and her racism is played as the twittering of a wealthy and ignorant fool. But given the *very* sketchy characterisations on offer, we have to stretch for that explanation rather further than we should, and it's not as if she gets her comeuppance. I don't think it's 'political correctness gone mad' to wish that Franco had found a better way than this to lampoon his characters...

Music: Hotel lobby jazz and various 'cheeky' cues do nothing at all to rescue the film.

Locations: The Farol Hotel in Cascais, Portugal.

Connections: If you're a glutton for punishment, how about a remake? See Franco's *El hotel de los ligues* (1982) for more of the same ... In *Obsession*, Lucas Balbo says that the porno musical for which Nini is rehearsing is "Sucking in the Rain", but the joke has been lost in the Italian version.

French theatrical release: A study of the French release shows, once again, that just because a Franco film has fallen out of circulation in the DVD and Blu-ray era does not mean it was a flop on its original release. On the contrary, *Elles font tout* played extensively in Paris between 1979 and 1983, becoming something of a fixture on the Parisian circuit and mopping up considerable sums over the years. It opened on six screens on 31 January 1979 (including the ever-reliable Beverley, plus the Gramont, Axis, Cinevog Saint-Lazare and Cinevog Montparnasse). During its first three weeks on release the number of screens diminished from six to three to one, after which it missed a week before reappearing on 28 February at the Pacific. This set in motion a series of intermittent one-week bookings across Paris, beginning with weeks commencing 23 May 1979 (at the Mery) and 6 June 1979 (at the Pix). In 1980 it resurfaced at the Cinevog Saint-Lazare (27 August); on 15 September 1982 it returned to the Beverley and a fortnight later the Cinevog Montparnasse. In 1983 it was back in circulation at the Mery (12 January), the Strasbourg (23 February), the Cinevog Montparnasse (4 May) and the Beverley again (24 August). All of which strongly suggests that *Elles font tout* was a sort of repertory stand-by which certain adult theatres could pull out of storage if they needed a sure thing, perhaps when another title had stiffed at the box office. It's notable that this film, rather than the more transgressive *Cocktail spécial* or the gloomier *Je brûle de partout*, was the 'hit' from the late De Nesle period. *Elles font tout* is essentially a comedy, with hardcore scenes leavened by absurd humour and much verbal silliness, making it as inoffensive and palatable a sex film as Franco ever produced (in fact it's very similar in this respect to another of Franco's high performers, 1974's *Célestine, An All Round Maid*). It also toured the provinces, including a booking in Nantes (14-20 February 1979) which proves that more than one print was in circulation at the same time.

Other versions: The Italian dub *Quel certo sapore* dispenses with the French credit sequence in favour of new typography set against a red background, typical of Italian hardcore ... For a greatest hits selection of scenes from *Elles font tout*, *Cocktail spécial* and *Je brûle de partout*, see also *Claire* (1983).

JE BRÛLE DE PARTOUT

(French theatrical title) *I Burn Everywhere*

France, 1978

French visa no: 49084

Alternative titles

Ik Ben Overal Heet (BEL Dutch-language title) *I Burn Everywhere*

Chaleurs, je brûle de partout (FR alt. video – Bier)

Rapt de nymphettes (pre-release title) *Rape of the Nymphettes*

Dossiers mineures (shooting title) *Dossier on Minors*

Production company

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Comptoir Français du Film Production (Paris)

Les Films du Dragon (Belgium)

Timeline

Shooting date	early	1978
French visa issued ('X' cert)	07 February	1979
Paris	11 April	1979

Theatrical running time

France	82m
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Video running time (converted)

FR 'MVP' Secam VHS	84m28s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown' – FR print, or 'Jacques Garcia' – IT video-cover]. writer: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Robert De Nesle**. director of photography/camera operator: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel J. White**. editor: **Claude Gros**. dubbing: **Studios Marcadet**. laboratory: **C.T.M. Gennevilliers**. Kodak Eastmancolor. Produced by **Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris).

Cast: **Brigitte Lahaie** (Lorna). **Didier Aubriot** (Lorna's boyfriend). **Susan Hemingway** (Jenny Goldstone). **Martine Fléty** (Maria, the Madame – intermediary between Lorna and Flora). **Aida Vargas** (Maria, sex slave brought by boat with Jenny). **Mel Rodrigo** (Robert, Flora's brother and male brothel runner). **Beni Touxa** (Madame Flora, female brothel runner). **Jean Ferrère** (Al Pereira). *Uncredited:* **Marius Clavier** (Madame Flora's manservant). *Video cover adds:* Philo Lemoine. *Christophe Bier adds:* Esther Studer.

Synopsis: *Pretty and naive teenager Jenny Goldstone enjoys a night of sexual abandon with a predatory couple who then drug her and sell her to a sex ring. Next day the female of the duo, Lorna, sees a newspaper*

report about the missing girl, revealing that she is the daughter of a rich businessman. Annoyed at having let this cash opportunity slip through their fingers without realising her value, the couple try to blackmail the father, demanding a ransom for her safe return, while intending to welch on the deal. Jenny is drugged with an aphrodisiac gas and enrolled as a sex worker in a sleazy nightclub run by procuress Madame Flora and her bisexual assistant Robert. Meanwhile private investigator Al Pereira is tracking Lorna, in search of the truth behind Jenny's disappearance. Lorna and her boyfriend overplay their hand: after attempting to make contact with Flora and the mysterious head of the slave ring – a man known only as 'Captain Marcos' – they are overpowered and flung into the aphrodisiac gas chamber. Eventually they escape, and, with Al Pereira, manage to track the elusive Captain Marcos to a beautiful seafront villa where he enjoys sadomasochistic sex with Madame Flora and Robert. When the new girl he's demanded for the orgy arrives from Madame Flora's, the 'Captain' is astonished to discover that it's his own daughter, Jenny. Dazed from the effects of the gas, she murmurs "Papa?" Horrified at last by the wickedness of his trade, Mr. Goldstone resolves to quit. He leaves with his daughter, only for Al Pereira, posing as his chauffeur, to escort him to the police.

Production notes: Initially announced to the French trade paper *Le Film Français* as *Rapt des nymphettes* ('Rape of the Nymphettes') in a poster advertisement dated 25 August 1978, *Je brûle de partout* emerged as the best of the three films Franco shot for Robert De Nesle in the early months of 1978. Franco's legendary good relations with his female leading ladies temporarily deserted him. Brigitte Lahaie wrote in her 1987 autobiography *Moi, la scandaleuse* that Franco badgered her to stay and shoot a second 'extra-hardcore' film with him; when she declined, he accused her of playing the star and sent her packing back to Paris on the next available flight. (Note: In 1986 she gave an interview that puts a slightly different spin on the story: "Actually, there was a dispute between Jess and I on a porno movie set. I wanted to return to Paris for personal reasons and Jess did not appreciate my departure which was certainly a little rushed. But it had nothing to do with our work."¹)

Review: With the opening credits spoken out loud over a disco-dancing scene, *Je brûle de partout* seems at first to be gearing up for something jaunty and jokey along the lines of 1975's *Midnight Party*. However, this is not what transpires. From the first sexual tryst, a threesome involving statuesque Brigitte Lahaie, shy Susan Hemingway, and sneering Didier Aubriot, a stifling downbeat mood descends upon the film. Said to have been shot in six days, *Je brûle de partout* suffers from the hastiness of such a daunting schedule, but against the odds feels very much like a genuine sex drama and not simply a directionless porno scuffle. If the horrors are a bit repetitive and the acting mostly functional, there's still enough here to make this obscurity worth seeking out. Unlike the vapid *Elles font tout* and the disappointing *Cocktail spécial*, its nearest neighbours chronologically and generically, *Je brûle de partout* has enough going on to make one wish for a pristine Blu-ray release

one day. Fans of nymphette Susan Hemingway and those who worship at the shrine of French porn superstar Brigitte Lahaie will find plenty to cherish in this dark and disturbing take on the grim underbelly of the seventies sex industry. Others, especially those unfamiliar with the director's work, will struggle to find much of worth in what can seem basically a rather depressing French sex film. Despite its redeeming features, *Je brûle de partout* requires commitment from the viewer, who should preferably have seen rather a lot of Jess Franco movies before trying this one.

Je brûle de partout is predicated on a great, nightmarish porno concept; an aphrodisiac gas that turns unwilling victims into sex slaves. This gives Franco the chance to explore the negative aspects of desire, picking up on a thread from *Shining Sex* and *Blue Rita*, showing sensual pleasures over-riding the individual's will and making them vulnerable to manipulation. The first great scene occurs when Jenny, drugged by Lorna and her boyfriend, is transported to shores unknown in the hold of a ship, barely able to understand where she is. There's a raddled junkie propped against her to one side, and a predatory older woman (*Blue Rita*'s Martine Fléty) reaching over to finger her pussy on the other. Welcome to the slave trade, pretty girl! The most memorable image of the film is of desperate women, imprisoned nude in a shabby, mattress-strewn basement, writhing helplessly on the floor whilst aphrodisiac gas is pumped into the room through a pipe in the ceiling. Franco films the scene from overhead, capturing in hellish tableau form the nightmare of endless desire, in a style that brings to mind the cluttered wriggling fleshscapes of Bosch (or the cover of Jimi Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland* gone haywire). "Oh please... I'm burning everywhere..." one woman moans, quoting the film's title and wriggling frantically among the other victims in a tangle of arms, legs and sweaty pussies. For a director who'd spent the best part of the 1970s making a slew of pornographic and semi-pornographic movies exploring every nook and cranny of voyeuristic passion, such a theme suggests self-doubt, an awareness that while 'a little of what you fancy does you good' is a stupid conservative motto, repeated exposure can bring its own problems; compulsive behaviour, diminishing returns, creeping dissatisfaction. It's no accident that in the ship's hold Franco places one actress whose appearance is so unkempt and spotty that you immediately think of heroin; this is a distressing, ugly vision of lust, a nightmare world of addiction, where sex is just another high to be exploited and turned into cash by unscrupulous dealers.

So *Je brûle de partout* is a morality tale, despite the sleazy imagery. In the film's major twist we see 'Captain Marcos', the man who's top of the female-trafficking tree, enjoying one of the fruits of his investment. A drugged girl is brought nude and compliant to his room to participate in a bisexual orgy; to his horror it's his daughter, recently kidnapped by a pair of freelance procurers and sold unwittingly to his brothel. The twist is a tad too convenient (a lot rests on coincidence), but it just about works. *Je brûle de partout*'s climactic reveal sees Franco shining an accusing light on the turpitude of his characters, the message of the film

not so different from the sort of water-cooler debates about drugs or prostitution that begin, 'How would you feel if it were *your* daughter?' The fact that Franco tells this tale just after *Cocktail spécial*, in which the same father-meets-daughter sex scenario is played not for moral critique but amoral enjoyment, suggests that these two films are located at a critical faultline in Franco's psyche. It's the boundary between cruelty and pity, a place he seems drawn to again and again, turning the problem this way and that.

Among the film's flaws, there's a distinct lack of characterisation for the hero of the hour, Al Pereira, who mooches around silently for most of the film, hardly speaking a word until the last reel when he captures Jenny's father and hands him over to the police. There are some glaring continuity errors too (or maybe missing footage): for instance, one minute we see Lahaie and Aubriot captured and thrown into the aphrodisiac dungeon, the next we see them at liberty again, breaking into the chateau where Robert and Flora are partying with 'Captain Marcos'.

Susan Hemingway, who excelled as the virtuous young victim in *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, is again perfectly cast as the abused innocent. Her character Jenny is leered at constantly, in scenes such as the one in which she demurely pulls a toilet door closed, only for lascivious Didier Aubriot to pull it back open to watch her pee, before ordering her, with a curt gesture, to use the bidet and wash her pussy. As a character she's purely a victim, blinking in confusion throughout, and it seems that Jenny is none too bright either: despite discovering that her slave-trading father is responsible for her torment, she remains plastered to his lapel even when the film's nominal hero, Al Pereira, reveals the awful truth. I was expecting a final tumble into horror for the girl, as it dawns on her that the depravity she's suffered was caused by her money-grabbing father, but instead she hunkers down beside him without reacting to Pereira's revelations. It's a limp scene that sabotages what could have been a powerful climax, but even so, *Je brûle de partout* remains the nasty, sleazy saving grace of the late-period Robert De Nesle productions.

Franco on screen: No appearance by Franco, unless he's a brothel customer hidden by the appalling video transfer.

Music: *Je brûle de partout* enjoys what was by now a rare honour – an all-new Daniel White score, unused in previous Franco films. White's accomplished jazz compositions, alternately lugubrious and manic, play genuine variations on a theme, another rarity for the cheaper Franco films in which music is generally a patchwork of available cues. The full ensemble pieces veer towards free jazz at times, while the central melody, a chromatic affair with some sly angles and surprises, is explored in various shades of gloom on baritone sax and cello. Soundtrack album please!

Locations: The central location, once again, is the Farol Hotel in Cascais, Portugal. The quayside location where Jenny's sex-trafficker father gets into his car is at 108 Av. Dom Carlos I in Cascais, immediately beside the Palácio da Cidadela de Cascais. It was previously seen in *Voodoo Passion* and reappears in *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* (1980).

Connections: Another outing for Al Pereira, this time played by stocky unknown Jean Ferrère. A far cry from previous Pereiras like the suave Howard Vernon or the puckish Jess Franco, Ferrère looks like an off-duty dockworker or a grumpy union leader (or, strangely, cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard)... The theme of women kept in an artificially induced state of sexual stimulation takes on much darker hues here than in the earlier *Blue Rita*, a similar story in which men instead of women were the victims. *Blue Rita* had a lightness of touch, a psychedelic good humour – here, the spectacle of women whooping and grunting and slobbering in helpless arousal takes on sickening and distressing qualities ... A major surprise comes in the form of an unexpectedly polymorphous fourway between Flora, Robert (Mel Rodrigo), Jenny (Hemingway) and a sex club customer, which concludes with Robert screwing the male customer while Flora gets it on with Jenny. The bisexual aspect is maintained in a later scene, showing über-trafficker 'Captain Marcos' being ridden around nude on all fours by a whip-wielding Robert, while Flora slobbers at his face. The guiding influence in this would appear to have been Mel Rodrigo, who also appears in *Ópalo de fuego*, made later the same year, and Franco's 1979 Sade adaptation *Sinfonía erótica*. Gay or bisexual action was still 'unusual' but not entirely unknown at the time in ostensibly 'straight' French porn; the prevailing urge to 'épater la bourgeoisie' led to all manner of variations, until the 1980s video boom removed the element of surprise, putting the viewer in total control of which parts they watched and which they fast-forwarded. Among the 'swinging' anything-goes porno films of the period are Serge Korber's *Dans la chaleur de Julie* (1975), Alain Payet's *Furies sexuelles* (1976), and *Véronique... nique... nique* (1978), and Jean Luret's *Délectation* (1977) ... Depictions of gay or bisexual men turn up more frequently in Franco's work from hereon, but it's not without reservations that I draw attention to the fact. We go from the polysexual antics of *Je brûle de partout* to a pair of weird old gay perverts exploiting a down-on-his-luck heterosexual teenager in *Las chicas de Copacabana*; from the camp affectations (literally) of Mel Rodrigo's character in *Ópalo de fuego* to the marriage-wrecking woman-hating limp-wristed fop he plays in *Sinfonía erótica*. Once we're in the 1980s a stream of camp stereotypes are trotted out, frequently by Franco himself, who seemed to find playing a 'comedy poof' most amusing.

French theatrical release: *Je brûle de partout* opened at four cinemas in Paris on the 11th of April 1979 (the Amsterdam Saint-Lazare, the Axis, the Scala and the Delambre Montparnasse), staying open on two screens the following week, and then surviving for another fortnight playing one screen only before closing its four week run. Its subsequent reappearances in Paris were few, compared to *Elles font tout*, but it nevertheless did turn up here and there (for instance at the Pix on 4 July 1979, and the Mery on 23 January 1980).

Other versions: Sometimes reported under the working titles *Rapt de nymphettes* and *Dossiers mineures* ... There is reputed to be a harder version of the film, which is not surprising as scene

after scene seems to head towards hardcore before swerving away. The rumour may, however, have its roots in the film *Claire* (1983), created by Joe D'Amato using footage from *Je brûle de partout*, *Cocktail spécial* and *Elles font tout*. *Claire* adds hardcore anal penetration close-ups to the sodomy scene in *Je brûle de partout* between Didier Aubriot and Susan Hemingway.

ÓPALO DE FUEGO (MERCADERES DEL SEXO)

(SP theatrical title) *Fire Opal* (*Sex Traders*)

Spain [& France], 1978

Spanish depósito legal no: M-6149-1979

French visa no: 50021

Alternative titles

Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur (FR theatrical)

Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties

Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties (export title)

2 espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur (FR theatrical poster)

Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties

Espionnes au soleil (FR video) *Spies in the Sun*

Spies in the Sun (FR video cover: alt title)

Opalo de fuego (Lascivia) (SP in-production listing)

Fire Opal: Lust

Lascivia (original script title)

Production companies (*Ópalo de fuego*):

Tritón P.C. (Madrid)

Estudio-8, Ltda. (Lisbon)

Production companies (*Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur*):

Tritón P.C. (Madrid)

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

C.I.D.C. [Cooperativa Industrial de Distribuciones] (Spain)

Altamira Films (Spain)

Eurociné (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date (<i>Ópalo de fuego</i>)	circa autumn	1978
Further shooting (<i>Deux espionnes...</i>)	Autumn	1979
Madrid	16 May	1980
French visa issued	06 June	1980
Murcia	24 June	1981
Seville	25 August	1980
France	15 October	1980

Barcelona	23 November	1981
Paris	21 July	1982

The SMC lists the first Spanish screening as 1 May 1980 but I can find no evidence of this.

Theatrical running time

Spain	96m
France	105m

DVD/Blu-ray running times

SP DVD (<i>Ópalo de fuego</i>)	90m15s
US 'Severin' Blu-ray (<i>Deux espionnes...</i>)	94m27s

Crew (*Ópalo de fuego*): director: **Jess Franco**. story and screenplay: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Joaquín Domínguez**. A **Triton P.C.** Production for **Altamira Films**. executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos** [as 'Fernando Vidal']. editor: **Jess Franco**. music: **Jess Franco**. camera operators: **Ramon Zaldia**, **Lionel Efe**. camera assistant: **Antonio Rodriguez**. continuity: **Francisco Roque**. production manager: **Óscar Cruz**. production assistant: **Francisco Romero**. 2nd production assistant: **Paquita Roque**. assistant director: **Fernando Vidal Rubio**. script supervisor: **Luis Vidal Rubio**. make-up: **Guillermina G. Venancio**. set decorator: **Nicole Guettard**. special effects: **Antonio Molina**. costumes: **Angeles Nuñez**. laboratories: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.** dubbing: **Sincronia, S.A.**

Cast (*Ópalo de fuego*): **Lina Romay** [as Candy Coster] (Cécile Le Pen). **Nadine Pascal** (Brigitte Lemoine). **Olivier Mathot** (Senator Connolly). **Mel Rodrigo** (Milton, a choreographer). **Joëlle Le Quément** [as 'Janet Lee'] (Irina Forbes). **Albino Graziani** (Carlos Morales). **Francisco Romero**. **Teodora Segura** [as 'Doris Regina'] (Estrella Shelwin, abducted girl in gold bathing cap). **Oscar Fernandes**. **Ana María Segura** [as 'Maria Teresa Pires'] (brunette torturer). **Duo Cabaquinhos** [trans: The Ukelele Duo] (inc. Juan, guitar player at hippy camp). **Pedro Gonzalez Jr.**. **Juan Garcia**. *Uncredited*: **Claude Boisson** (Ralph Forbes, Irina's husband).

Crew (*Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur*): director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Dan Simon']. story: Evelyne Scott [as 'Evelyne Deher'] [actually **Jess Franco**]. music: **Daniel J. White**. production manager: **Marius Lesoeur**. photography: Gérard Brissaud [actually **Jess Franco**]. cameraman: Alain Hardy [actually **Jess Franco**]. assistant director: **Jean Pierre Decroux**. script supervisor: **Ilona Kunesova**. chief editor: **Roland Grillon**. assistant [editor]: **Dominique Petit**. sound mixer: **Claude Panier**. laboratory: **Vitfer**. *Uncredited*: executive producer: **Marius Lesoeur**.

Cast (*Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur*): **Claude Boisson** [as 'Yul Sanders'] (Ralph Forbes, Irina's husband). **Muriel Montossé**

woman who abducts Adriana). **Jean Roville** (Butler, a senior politician). **Olivier Mathot** (Senator Connolly). *Uncredited*: **Susan Hemingway** (Adriana Rinaldi). **Didier Aubriot** (man raping abducted girl). *Export version adds*: **Nadine Pascal** (Brigitte Lemoine). **Lina Romay** [as 'Line Castel'] (Cécile Pery). **Joëlle Le Quément** [as 'Joelle Leclair'] (Mrs. Irina Forbes). *Uncredited, from Ópalo de fuego*: **Mel Rodrigo** (Mario/Milton). **Albino Graziani** (Carlos Morales). **Teodora Segura** (Estrella Shelwin, abducted girl in gold bathing cap). **Ana María Segura** (brunette torturer). **Duo Cabaquinhos** [trans: The Ukelele Duo] (inc. Juan, guitar player at hippy camp).

Synopsis (Ópalo de fuego): Irina Forbes and her husband Ralph, owner of the Flamingo Club, use hypnosis to abduct famous girls, whom they sell to wealthy perverts. Their current 'project' is a young woman called Estrella. Two strippers, Cécile Le Pen and Brigitte Lemoine, arrive in Las Palmas to work at the Flamingo. They are met off the plane by Milton, a gay choreographer. A man called Morales spies on them. Cécile is working undercover to investigate the Forbeses: she takes photos of a young woman named Joan Simon begging two men to let her go. Later that evening, Irina Forbes performs a stage act in which she makes love to a severed head. At the club, Brigitte dallies with Mr. Connolly, a rich customer whom she vaguely remembers. Back at the hotel, Cécile discovers a corpse in her wardrobe. Milton helps her to get rid of it. Next evening, Cécile is abducted by two women working for the Forbeses. Under hypnosis she admits that she's been sent by Senator Connolly of the US Secret Service, who is investigating the disappearances. Cécile escapes, and with Milton's help she hides out with a group of hippie bikers. Connolly reminds Brigitte that they met in a French prison when she was sentenced for prostitution. He had arranged for her release. Brigitte is kidnapped by Irina's girls. When Milton arrives at the hotel to collect Cécile's belongings he's given a note by the concierge. He meets Morales and gives him the photos Cécile took. Morales tells Milton to kill Cécile. However, at the hippie camp Milton explains that he made copies of the photos, because he also works for the Secret Service, searching for the missing women. Connolly meets the chief of police who tells him that Forbes has powerful protectors. He also says that Cécile is a post-op transsexual. After the meeting, Connolly is killed by Forbes's men. Cécile and Milton return to the club and find Brigitte tortured to death. Irina recaptures Cécile and tries to hypnotise her. The chief of police lures Morales into a trap and has him killed. Cécile is tortured by Irina's henchwomen but Milton and the hippies rescue her. Milton kills Ralph Forbes, and when Irina escapes in a helicopter she's shot down by a hippie. Milton, who was only pretending to be gay, agrees to marry Cécile.

Synopsis (Deux espionnes): Cécile Perry and Brigitte Lemoine, two dancers recently incarcerated for unlicensed stripping, are pulled out of prison and blackmailed by Inspector Garcia and an American, Senator Connolly, into becoming spies, investigating a pair of sex traffickers, Mr. and Mrs. Forbes. The girls are to work undercover as strippers for the Forbeses at the Flamingo Club in Las Palmas. Cécile is instructed to hook up with Milton, a gay choreographer who'll be her liaison. Once there,

she's to take photographs of anything suspicious. One of the abducted is porn actress Adriana Rinaldi, who's raped and hypnotised by the Forbeses then sold to a rich pervert. At the nightclub, Cécile begins investigating strange goings-on, taking photographs of a rape in a hotel room involving a young woman called Joan Taylor. Meanwhile, Brigitte forces herself on the limply protesting Milton. Next evening at the club, Cécile and Brigitte are 'introduced' to Senator Connolly. However, Mr. Forbes finds out that the girls are working for him. In the cellar of their apartment the Forbeses have a young captive, Estrella Shelwin. The next evening, Cécile is abducted by two women working for the Forbeses, and imprisoned with Estrella. Under hypnotic influence, Cécile admits she's working for the police. Later, having swapped clothes with Estrella, she escapes, and with Milton's help hides out with a group of hippie bikers. The Forbeses kidnap Brigitte and torture her for information about Cécile. Butler, Connolly's superior, reveals that the Forbeses have protection from senior police and politicians. The blame for their crimes is to be pinned on a minor gangster, Carlos Morales. Cécile and Milton receive a note saying that Brigitte has been kidnapped. At the Flamingo Club, Cécile finds Brigitte dead, and is then tortured for more information. The police, led by Inspector Garcia, frame Morales for the abductions and arrange for him to be shot while 'resisting arrest'. Mr. Forbes informs his wife he's planning to cease their criminal venture, but before they can make their escape the mansion is stormed by Milton's hippie friends. The Forbeses helicopter is shot down by a hippie, and Milton rescues Cécile. He declares his love for her and announces he is no longer interested in men...

Production notes: Soon after completion of *Cocktail spécial*, *Elles font tout* and *Je brûle de partout*, Franco decided to move back to his homeland. Spain was changing: censorship was being relaxed, and the social climate was becoming more agreeable for a man like him. He had in fact been considering a return to Spain ever since the death of the authoritarian dictator General Francisco Franco on 20 November 1975. He told Carlos Tejeda in 2006: "After the change of the regime, when the Transition began, Lina and I came to Madrid to see how things were. We went to a hotel and the next morning I said, 'You stay calm, I'm going to the Ministry to see how it is.' I went, I saw how it was, I went back to the hotel and said, 'Let's go, because we've come too soon.' In the Ministry I met all the same fascists as before."¹

Other things were changing too. An important personal influence on Franco's decision to leave France and move back to Spain was the death of his friend and producer Robert de Nesle, who passed away on 21 April 1978 at the age of 72. De Nesle's death marked the end of Comptoir Français du Film Production as an effective production house, leaving Franco with only one French company with whom to do business – Eurociné. Also of significance was the breakdown of Franco's marriage to Nicole Guettard, and Romay's recent divorce from Ramón Ardid. After eight years of gradually increasing intimacy, Franco and Romay, director and muse, were now ready to commit to each other for the rest of their lives. Far from settling into domesticity, however, Franco would make another eighty-four films before his death, with Romay appearing in more than sixty of them!

The move back to Spain reinvigorated Franco, pulling him out of the uncharacteristic depression which had assailed him in the months after leaving Erwin Dietrich's safe production harbour. The films he made straight after the move, while not among his best, were certainly a lot better than the lacklustre porno trilogy he'd recently made for De Nesle. First off the blocks was a crime thriller with comic and erotic undertones, *Ópalo de fuego* (mercaderes del sexo), followed by *Las chicas de Copacabana* (a coming-of-age comedy), *Sinfonia erótica* (a period chamber piece based on a single chapter from De Sade's *Justine*) and *The Sadist of Notre Dame*, a radical restructuring, with new material, of his 1974 film *Exorcism*. In each case, money came from Tritón, a Madrid-based company run by Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo, with additional financing from Eurociné for all except *Sinfonia erótica*. Tritón was a small company which had started up in the 1960s: its first production was a documentary called *Arquitectura hacia el futuro* (1967) by Tombs of the Blind Dead creator Amando de Ossorio, followed by the same director's *Pasto de fieras* (1969), a now hard-to-see drama made immediately prior to his first horror film *Malenka* (1969). Tritón remained solvent for a while during the late 1970s and early 1980s: among their other notable releases was *Poseida* (aka *Losceno desiderio*) a 1978 Italian-Spanish co-production by Giulio Petroni, starring Marisa Mell and Lou Castel. A few years later, Tritón would finance two more Franco films: the extraordinarily bizarre *El sexo está loco* (1980) and the gentle erotic fantasy *El lago de las vírgenes* (1981).

Ópalo de fuego was co-produced by a small Portuguese company called Estudio 8: according to Franco scholar Francesco Cesari, this was a Portuguese offshoot of Jess Franco's own Manacoa Films. Although this does indeed seem very likely, the company pre-existed Franco's involvement: apart from Franco's *Ópalo de fuego* and *Sinfonia erótica*, Estudio 8 produced a 1968 musical called *El padre Copillilas*: the production managers on this obscurity were Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo (of Tritón), and Victor Costa (an old pal of Franco's who had worked on at least three Portuguese-shot Franco films – *The Demons*, *Les Chatouilleuses* and *Le Fousseur* – as a production assistant, production manager and/or location manager). Perhaps Franco pumped in some of his own money to pick up his friend's ailing business?

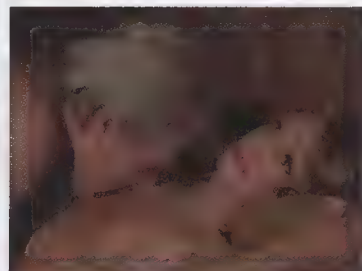
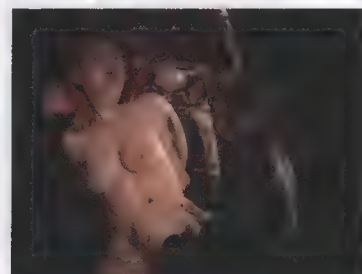
Review: *Ópalo de fuego*'s opening credits roll over the image of a dark-skinned young woman being hypnotised by an unseen female, using a large opal ring as the focus of her mesmeric influence. From this, we cut to the airport of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, where two bubbly and cheerful strippers, Cécile and Brigitte, are met by a friendly, extremely camp young man who introduces himself as Milton, MC of the Flamingo Club where the girls are due to start work...

The hotchpotch of elements that follows ricochets unpredictably between light and dark, comic and savage. With a manic disregard for consistency of tone, Franco delivers one of the bumpiest rides in his catalogue, incorporating crime-caper silliness, sexy

dancing, anti-authoritarian hippie idealism, topless lesbians, cigarette-on-nipple torture ("We like our cigarettes to have a slight taste of burnt flesh"), action movie tropes, rape (both serious and comedic), female-on-female violence, and that uniquely sleazy vibe that oozes from all of his best films. The result – by turns invigorating and perplexing, frustrating and disconcerting – shows Franco opting once again for the *Midnight Party* approach. As he explained to Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher in 1996, "I don't believe in a straight storyline like that [draws a line across the table] with no variations. Because if you make a tragedy – or even if you live a tragedy – suddenly some funny things happen around the tragedy, of course. Otherwise it would be too straight a story; and if you had to live such a life you would kill yourself. Because even in the most difficult or most dangerous situations there is something nice, or funny, or lovely happening around you. And I know sometimes I go too far looking for such things around my characters or my story. But I do it in a very sincere way."²

The film's brutality and madcap humour may jar one another but the results could have been quite commercial, if only Franco had kept a firm hand on the pacing and technical aspects. Filmed with more coverage and edited with care, this could have been one of his most enjoyably sleazy black comedies; instead it went before the camera during a period when Franco was emerging from something of a blue funk, which means that a lingering lassitude dampens the fun a little. Technically, too, *Ópalo de fuego* is amazingly slipshod. While Franco's trademark zooming is not a problem, the focus-pulling accuracy leaves a lot to be desired. Many scenes (especially those in Cécile's murkily lit hotel room) are so persistently out of focus that it gets in the way of comprehension. Zooming in and out changes the focal length of the image back and forth, and can result in shots sliding out of focus if the position of the camera moves spatially at the same time. The same problem occurred intermittently in Franco's previous films, but there is a compelling case to be made for at least some of these out-of-focus shots being deliberate aesthetic choices. That won't really wash here, as the problem occurs during mundane exposition scenes where there's no credible argument to be made for 'dream ambience' or 'expressionist sensuality'. One suspects that Franco was seriously out of practise, having been cold-shouldered from the cameraman role in the previous three years by Erwin Dietrich's professional crews. In *Ópalo de fuego* whole scenes play out in blurry, poorly lit conditions, and with a story so fragmented and disorganised the film can ill afford to alienate viewers.

Plotting is likewise a problem. This is meant to be some kind of thriller, but the story as a whole fails to cohere because Franco has allowed the scattergun of impulse to take over. This approach works fine for horror-erotica, where fragmentary storylines and ruptured logic add to the fun, but for crime thrillers it's less well suited, turning narrative meat into something peculiar from the Futurist Cookbook, simultaneously intriguing and indigestible. From the standpoint of conventional storytelling, it's just a tangle of barely related events which fail to cohere into a story.



TOP LEFT: Club owner, cabaret artiste and sex trafficker Irina Forbes (Joëlle Le Quément) plays Salome with a real severed head in *Opalo de fuego* (a scene that was cut from *Two Female Spies* with *Flowered Panties*).

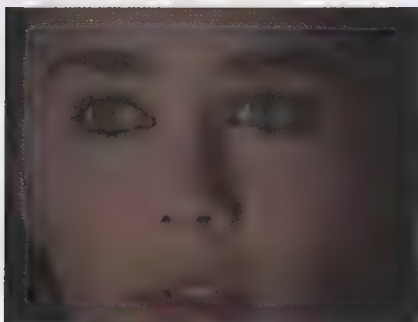
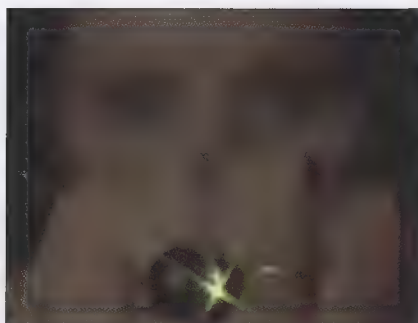
BOTTOM LEFT: Cécile (Lina Romay) and Brigitte (Nadine Pascal) audition their terrible cabaret act.

RIGHT COLUMN, FROM TOP: Cécile finds sanctuary, and a welcome joint, at a hippy commune in the Caves of Valeron, Gran Canaria.

Irina Forbes and her husband (Yul Sanders) take great pleasure in torturing Brigitte for information.

Brigitte and Cécile perform at the club. "What am I doing here?" Brigitte sleeps with Senator Connolly of the US Secret Service (Olivier Mathot).





ABOVE: Hypnotist sex trafficker Irina Forbes, and victim Adriana Rinaldi (Susan Hemingway).

RIGHT: Captive beauty Estrella Shelwin (Teodora Segura).

BELOW: Forbes (Yul Sanders) manhandles the merchandise.



However, these are complaints more suited to the outside world, beyond the boundaries of Franco-land. If you're a dual nationality citizen of his country of the imagination there are numerous pleasures to be savoured. In one creepy and effective scene, Cécile arrives at the apparently deserted Flamingo Club, looking for Brigitte. The disco lamps on the ceiling swivel back and forth, clicking like geiger counters, an ominous sound that would usually be obscured by pounding music or the chatter of customers. Cécile finds Brigitte, nude and covered in blood, slumped on one of the seats, but just as she reaches out, her friend expires. Suddenly there's mood, and suspense, and a sense of emotional connection. Let's not forget the sexual violence either: it's quite astounding, with cigarette burns on breasts, and Forbes's female goons 'teasing' Cécile with a knife between her legs, threatening to cut up her vagina. It's all quite shocking, and yet the film is often ignored by Franco fans. I think it's because the shocks are somehow failing to connect. It's as if *Ópalo de fuego* has no nervous system: the cruel moments are astonishingly sleazy when viewed in isolation, but they don't transmit their sensation to the whole. There's something simultaneously nasty and disconnected about it: like watching pins being shoved into a severed hand.

The stand-out scene is redolent of Ken Russell in shock-the-vicar mode, as slave trader Irina Forbes (the striking Joëlle Le Quément) performs a live sex show in the guise of Biblical man-eater Salome. Initially a rather boring cabaret act, her performance is suddenly electrified as she produces what is meant to be a genuine severed head and proceeds to kiss it, rubbing it over her body and pushing it between her legs. It's an image of depraved sensual pleasure that Oscar Wilde would probably have loved, having scandalised theatre audiences for his 1896 stage version by having Salome kiss the severed head of John the Baptist. And the sense of transgression is increased, certainly for late 1970s Spain, as the scene in question takes place in a crepuscular lesbian nightclub where cougars, not panthers, feast.

Butch lesbian clubgoers? A camp queen as one of the lead characters? Are we seeing a more culturally inclusive Jess Franco emerging here? Don't get your rainbow flags out yet, folks, it's not quite that simple. It's debatable whether gay viewers are meant to be amused or dismayed by the scene in which giggling Brigitte (played by coquettish Nadine Pascal) 'rapes' fey young Milton (Mel Rodrigo). It's clearly just a joke, and the actors are having a ball; as rapes go it's rather like the attempted molestation in *The Girls of the Copacabana*. Milton, it turns out, is not even gay; he's only posing as a homosexual choreographer to investigate the Forbes' vice ring. As soon as he lets the camp facade slip, he's dubbed with a deep masculine voice and enjoys a hearty snog with Cécile. (See the alternate version listed below for a rather different take on Milton's change of character...)

Material involving cynical police and politicians plotting to cover up a sex-trafficking ring, and a sequence in which Milton summons help for Cécile from a posse of hippies who reside in a cave system on the edge of town, lend an unexpectedly anarchistic

climax to this defiantly oddball film. Franco posits totally corrupt international authorities, up to their eyeballs in connivance with organised crime, with only social dropouts offering a refuge from evil. But while this adds colour to the story, it's applied with a very broad brush; the State is evil, the individual is our salvation, and three cheers for the weirdos. One can dig where he's coming from, but it's a little too inchoate to be called progressive.

Ópalo de fuego is another of those weird and intermittently wonderful oddities which Franco dashed off from time to time, made in such a rush that it feels more like a daydream than a film, a hazy 'note to self' about a possible future project, which has arrived on the screen instead of the film it was going to be. It may be too slapdash and bereft of coherence for wider appreciation, and it's not 'top tier' by any stretch of the imagination, but for the converted it's a tasty truffle in the loam of the Franco forest, and as such is well worth seeking out.

Cast and crew: 'Doris Regina', real name Teodora Segura, appears four times in Franco's films, beginning here, as the abductee Estrella Shelwin. She went on to appear as one of the villainess's lesbian enforcers in *Linda* (1981), Lina Romay's best friend in *Pick-Up Girls* (1981) and one of the mystical nymphettes in *El lago de las vírgenes* (and possibly an Eastern princess in 1981's *Oasis of the Zombies*). Her real life sister (possibly her twin) is Ana Maria Segura (aka Mari Carmen Segura, aka 'Mary Stein'), who also pops up in *Pick-Up Girls*, playing a cynical whore financially embarrassed by the death of her sugar-daddy ... Often mis-spelled as 'Dud Cabaquinhos', the cast credit for Duo Cabaquinhos requires some explanation. It is in fact not a person's name but instead translates as 'The Cabaquinho Duo' – the cabaquinho is a Portuguese four-stringed instrument shaped like an acoustic guitar. This suggests that the name relates to Juan, guitarist at the hippy camp where Cecile hides from the Forbeses. Close inspection reveals that Juan isn't literally playing the cabaquinho (his guitar is six-stringed), and it remains a mystery which of the assembled hippies is the other half of the 'Duo Cabaquinho', but all the evidence suggests this is a band name credit rather than an individual.

Music: Daniel White's score is a loungecore treat for saxophone, electric piano and Arp Solina. The title music is available on the *Ambianza Acoustica* CD ("Farewell Duke"), as is the music for the police raid on Morales ("Salza Infernale").

Locations: Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, with the distinctive Hotel Santa Catalina prominently featured. The hippies hang out at the Caves of Valeron aka the "cenobio de Valerón", built before Roman times and used by the island's inhabitants until the end of the 15th century. Franco filmed there long before the caves were turned into a tourist attraction: nowadays the site offers visitors "a discovery circuit with information panels along the path, maquettes and other media".

Connections: The tune hummed by Lina Romay during the opening strip scene is the same one played on saxophone by the Red Lips girls in *Kiss Me Monster*, and the presence of two sexy

girls investigating crime is fleetingly reminiscent of the 'Red Lips' films of the 1960s. However, Cécile and Brigitte are very different characters; they're both rather shallow and ditsy, whereas the Red Lips girls comprised a cool, intelligent ice-queen and her fun-loving sex-mad sidekick ... The sex-trafficking aspect is very similar to the recent Robert De Nesle production *Je brûle de partout*...

French theatrical release: Although some sources claim the film played unspecified locations in France as early as 15 October 1980, I have not been able to verify this assertion independently. As far as I can ascertain, the film first played in Paris, opening at the Cinevog Saint-Lazare and the Ritz on 21 July 1982.

Other versions: In 1979, Franco was asked by his French producers Eurociné to come up with an overhauled version of *Ópalo de fuego* for release in France and possibly English-speaking territories. It's unclear exactly why Marius Lesoeur wanted such a drastically different version of the film, but Franco certainly delivered, shooting thirty-five minutes of new material while working on *Sinfonia erótica* in Sintra in 1979. The resulting mutation was named *Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleurs* aka *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*. As a title it's certainly memorable, but it's also quite misleading – sorry to say, the heroines do *not* wear flowered panties, or if they do they keep them hidden. As things turned out, the film was never released in Great Britain or the USA, so whatever financial kickback Eurociné were hoping for seems not to have materialised. *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties* only caught the attention of English-speaking film collectors thanks to a video release in the Netherlands in the mid-1980s, and a wonderfully daft English-language trailer appended to various Dutch VHS releases. For many Franco fans, the Spanish original remained obscure until a DVD release from Manga Films turned up in 2006.

As so often with Eurociné productions, the cast and crew credits are either misleading, confusing or massively incomplete. Despite utilising nearly an hour of *Ópalo de fuego*, *Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleurs* neglects to credit four of the six leading cast members onscreen – including the two stars Lina Romay and Nadine Pascal! Supporting cast members like Joëlle Le Quément and Mel Rodrigo disappear from the credits too, in fact the only original players to get their names on *Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleurs* are Yul Sanders and Olivier Mathot, both of whom, it should be noted, worked regularly for Eurociné! Instead of crediting the key actors, the Eurociné version names Muriel Montossé and Jean Roville, both of whom appear only briefly, in the newly shot footage. Somewhere down the line, angry words must have been exchanged, because the English-language export version, *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*, concedes a credit to Nadine Pascal and 'Joelle Leclair' (aka Joëlle Le Quément). Romay, however, remains hidden behind the one-off pseudonym 'Line Castel' (or her preferred pseudonym 'Candy Coster' on the pressbook). Susan Hemingway, who features prominently in the newly shot footage, is mentioned on neither the French nor the English-language version! The directorial credit on *Deux espionnes/*

Two Female Spies is 'Dan Simon', a pseudonym previously used by Franco on the Eurociné production *Shining Sex*, and by Daniel Lesoeur on the short film *Caroline mannequin nu* (1971). The screenplay is credited to Evelyne Deher (aka the actress Evelyne Scott). The Spanish credits are the only ones worth taking seriously: they credit Jess Franco with "story, screenplay and direction".

Beginning discordantly, with cheerful pop-jazz over images of miserable weather, *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties* remains as much of a tone collage as its progenitor. The following list describes the new additions:

1. A rainy-day drive down a Portuguese seafront, with Lina Romay and Nadine Pascal in the back of a police car.
2. A deliberately absurd strip routine by Pascal and Romay, which they're instructed to perform by vice cop Olivier Mathot. It's possibly the worst 'dance routine' Franco has ever filmed, but wait! It's intentionally bad, and the absurdity is carefully contrived. A perverse way to start a film? Leave it to Jess...
3. An abduction, followed by a sleazy rape, involving Franco's regular whipping-girl of the period Susan Hemingway, whose character doesn't exist in *Ópalo de fuego*. Her scenes were shot at the Palacio de Seteais in Sintra, Portugal, during the making of *Sinfonia erótica* (1979). Hemingway's character, Adriana Rinaldi, is gloatingly described by Forbes (Yul Sanders) as "the most beautiful nymphette in erotic films – your movies have made you one of the most desirable creatures on the face of the Earth. One of my clients, Alberto Capuano, known as 'the lonely millionaire', wants you all for himself. You'll belong to him, body and soul..." Sanders' cohort in the abduction and rape is played by Muriel Montossé (soon-to-be star of several classic Franco films), but she drops out after this sequence. The way in which she's interpolated into the film suggests that Franco was hoping we would mistake her for Joëlle Le Quément!
4. A sequence in which Cécile, spying from her hotel balcony, photographs a young abductee, Joan Taylor, being molested by a mentally disabled youth whose rich father has bought him a sex-slave. This scene is quite puzzling; it was certainly shot during the *Ópalo de fuego* schedule (location and lighting match the surrounding material) but it appears to have been conceived one way 'in camera' and then another way in the dubbing. While the voice artists play the scene as a rape, the onscreen actress, though constantly struggling, is being playful, and can be seen smiling in several shots. The scene ends with the 'rapist' glancing up from his victim as though caught in the act, but there's no one there to explain his reaction...
5. A prolonged scene between the Forbeses (Joëlle Le Quément and Yul Sanders) on a balcony overlooking the ocean, in which they discuss the financial problems of slave trading before indulging in some softcore cunnilingus.
6. A nasty scene in which Mr. Forbes slowly throttles Brigitte with a leather belt, while his wife gropes the victim's nude torso and promises more agony in store unless she confesses her involvement with the authorities. Shot in lascivious,

EUROCINE présente

2 ESPIONNES

avec

UN *PETIT SLIP À FLEURS*

2 FEMALE SPIES with flowered panties

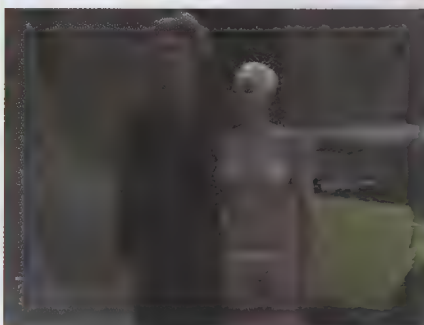
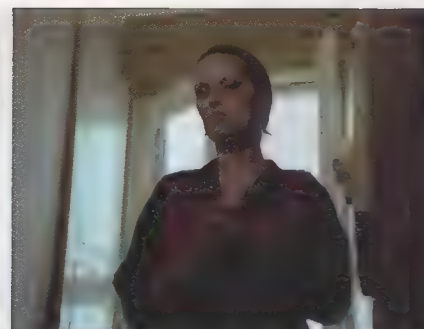


UN FILM DE DAN SIMON AVEC:

MADINE PASCALE

JOELLE LECLAIRE

CANDY COSTER



MAIN PICTURE: French pressbook cover. Feast your eyes, flowered panty freaks, these are the only ones you'll see, because the girls don't wear them in the film!
SIDE COLUMN. FROM TOP: Joëlle Le Quément as Irina Forbes ... Yul Sanders and Joëlle Le Quément as bickering sex traffickers ... Feel the wickedness - Sanders and Le Quément as the wicked couple ... Cécile works undercover taking photos of strange occurrences ... Milton (Mel Rodrigo) at the hippy commune with Cécile (who is dressed in Estrella Shelwin's clothes)



from *The Girls of Copacabana*: MAIN PICTURE: Humbert-ish Uncle Carlos (Olivier Mathot) with his blushing teenage bride-to-be, Juanita (Michelle Hermett).
 BOTTOM LEFT: Hans (Jérôme Foulon) and Juanita have an argument (about who forgot the sunblock?).
 BOTTOM RIGHT: Lia (Lina Romay) hides from Hans's father.

leering fashion, with Nadine Pascal's body lit perfectly – lots of straining flesh and jutting breasts being fondled for the viewer's amusement – this is presumably what Eurociné thought the first version was lacking.

7. Mathot takes his problems to his superior, Butler, played by French actor Jean Roville (previously seen in Juan Fortuny's hilarious Eurociné monstrosity, *Crimson*). The scene lays Franco's political cynicism straight on the line, as the Senator is told in no uncertain terms to forget his moral crusade against sex trafficking, because the power structures of the Western world are corrupt from top to bottom. The wicked Forbeses, we are told, have iron-clad protection at the highest levels. And just for spite, Butler mentions that Brigitte, whom Connolly has just been screwing, is actually a 'post-op' transsexual. Hold that thought; it's a sign of things to come in early-80s Franco...
8. An incredibly protracted scene (three-and-a-half minutes, but it feels like thirty) in which Forbes tells his wife Irina that he doesn't loves her, and will no longer allow her to manipulate him into crime. Instead, he intends to retire to an island paradise, where she's welcome to join him if she can tolerate their new 'understanding'. Irina listens to him without saying a word, choosing instead to wriggle around nude on the marital bed.
9. Though not a newly added scene, the ending of *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*, in which Cécile and Milton/Mario discuss their future plans, is so drastically altered in the dubbing that it casts a shadow over the rest of the film. In a breathtakingly dumb 'character twist', camp-as-Christmas Milton, having first emerged as the hero by persuading his biker friends to save Cécile from the torturers, promptly turns straight, declaring to Cécile that he's finished with men and wants to settle down and marry her. We can't have a *fag* saving the day, can we?

THE GIRLS OF THE COPACABANA

(US DVD cover title)

Spain & France, 1978

French visa no: 50822

Spanish depósito legal no: M-6147-1979

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Las chicas de Copacabana (SP) *Copacabana Girls*

Les filles de Copacabana (FR theatrical) *Copacabana Girls*

Unconfirmed titles

Las Muchachas de Copacabana (SP video?) *Copacabana Girls*

Production companies

Tritón P.C. (Madrid)

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

C.I.D.C. [Cooperativa Industrial de Distribuciones] (Spain)

Altamira Films (Spain)

Eurociné (Paris)

Timeline

First shooting period (Portugal)	circa November	1978
Second shooting period (Paris)	February	1979
Third shooting period (Rio)	May	1979
French visa issued	30 March	1979
Seville	15 May	1981
Barcelona	17 May	1982
Madrid	30 January	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain 95m

DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Manga Films' PAL DVD 89m04s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar** [& **Jess Franco**]. music: **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. music publisher: **Carla** (Paris). executive producer: **Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo** [as 'Joaquín Domínguez']. assistant directors: **Fernando Vidal Rubio**, **Claude Plaut**. script supervisor: **Luis Vidal Rubio**. sound recordist: **Jacques Orth**. production manager: **Daniel Lesoeur**. production assistant: **Óscar Cruz**. art director: **Antonio Montero**. stills photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. make-up: **Nicole Guettard**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. dubbing: **Estudios Magna**.

Cast: **Michelle Hermett/Michèle Hermet** (Juanita Martinez). **Leonardo Melo Acosta** [as 'Leonardo Da Costa'] (Juan Turan/Jean Durand). **Jérôme Foulon** (Hans Smid). **Vítor Mendes** (Mr. Smid, Hans' father). **Lina Romay** (Lia, Hans's seductress). **Jean Marie Lemaire** (Roger, Juanita's blond 'suitor', Carlos's nephew). **Olivier Mathot** (Carlos Martín Frey de Acosta, Roger's uncle). *Uncredited:* **Daniel Lesoeur** (man outside phonebox). **Antonio de Cabo** (Lia's father). **Juan Soler** (guitarist). *Bier adds:* **Carmen Lucia**. **Eduardo Hell**.

Synopsis: *Juanita, Hans and Jean, three close friends and students in Paris, decide to sneak off to the Carnival in Brazil, using money given to Hans by his rich father in furtherance of his studies. Jean and Hans both enjoy occasional sex with Juanita, but once in Rio, the three go out looking for excitement alone. Hans, despite his studious nature, finds women throwing themselves at him non-stop; Juanita makes many friends, including a rich older man and his amorous son;*

meanwhile Jean has trouble finding a girl, until he persists in getting to know a pretty black sex worker. Hans's father arrives in Rio to check that his money is being spent wisely, and Hans tries to conceal his excesses. After a row, the three friends split up – will they ever make it back to Paris?

Production notes: *Las chicas de Copacabana* is a complicated production, comprising material shot in Portugal, France and Brazil. Juan Soler, who was director of photography and stills cameraman on the first part of the shoot, recalls that the film was begun in Portugal in 1978. Included among the Portuguese scenes are several designed to simulate a 'carnival atmosphere', with dancing extras and party streamers strewn everywhere to give the impression of a Rio setting. All of the sequences featuring rotund Vítor Mendes and elegant Antonio de Cabo were shot in Portugal too. The opening scenes of Leonardo Da Costa and Michelle Hermett busking in the rain were shot on the Champs-Élysées, Paris, probably in February 1979 (the cinema behind them is showing *Confidences pour confidences*, released in Paris on the 3rd January 1979, and Truffaut's *L'Amour en fuite*, released in Paris on the 24th January 1979, while a cutaway to Jérôme Foulon arriving in his car reveals the Richard Attenborough film *Magic* at a theatre across the street. *Magic* opened in Paris on the 14th February, which makes the most likely shooting date for these scenes mid-to-late February 1979).

The Brazil footage was then picked up later, in May 1979, after which Franco returned to Spain to shoot *El escarabajo de oro* (see p.173). The only scenes clearly shot in Rio are a four and a half minute sequence with the three leads in an open-topped car, with Sugarloaf Mountain and the statue of Christ the Redeemer visible in the background, and just over a minute of Da Costa and Hermett busking Parisian songs outside a Rio restaurant. This footage is technically poor, and heavily over-exposed: maybe there was more material shot in Brazil that couldn't be used at all? The film was given a CNC approval number on 30th March 1979, according to Aknin and Bier's *Eurociné – Cinéma bis français et familial*. (The official CNC website for some reason is devoid of information relating to the film, although the print version of the CNC Archives declares the film as a 70%-30% Spanish-French co-production with Spain as the major partner.)

Review: Wryly affectionate in its view of teenagers' sexual adventures, and their dawning realisation that life doesn't always play fair, *Las chicas de Copacabana* is uncharacteristically gentle for a Jess Franco film. Although it's fairly insubstantial it has has an odd, wistful air hiding beneath the jollity. It's based around three likeable young performers – female lead Michelle Hermett, French actor Jérôme Foulon and Spanish teenager Leonardo Da Costa – who enliven the comic situations and make you feel that these are real people, not just stock comedy characters.

In particular, there's rather more attention given to the male characterisation this time: Jérôme Foulon's bookish music graduate

Hans, obsessed with Beethoven, discovers to his surprise that he's a bone fide 'pussy magnet', while Da Costa's sexy-but-needy Juan tries to coast along on his latin-loverman schtick but repeatedly fails to score.

The comedy aspects are variable. You'd have to be a fan of the mouldiest British farce to enjoy the scene where Hans plays host to his rich father, in a hotel room the old man is paying for, while in every possible hiding place a scantily clad young woman is concealed (Jess loved this gag so much he re-staged it in 1983's *Sangre en mis zapatos*). But Franco is not trying to be innovative here, he's making light-hearted nonsense with just a twist of genuine feeling. Da Costa proves himself an immediate asset for such a project. A lively physical performer, unafraid of acting the fool, he exudes a spontaneous sexiness that even his buffoonish characterisation can't really subvert. Among the familiar faces, Lina Romay puts in a relatively brief appearance as a sex-kitten intent on getting her hands on Hans, and Vítor Mendes, usually either a grotesque bully or an idiotic comedy character in Franco's films, here plays a dignified and surprisingly liberal father who indulges his wayward son and bails out his friends too. And it's always amusing to see the incorrigibly sleazy Olivier Mathot making his moves on a pretty young woman, something that I'm sure provided him with a career's worth of motivation. Playing the rich older gentleman card for all it's worth, he almost manages to take Juanita up the aisle, but thanks to the last minute wisdom of her friends she's spared this catastrophic misfortune. And she's not the only one to be saved from an unfortunate liaison. Earlier we see Juan ensconced in the boudoir of two extraordinarily creepy-looking gay men, who have offered their hospitality with goodness knows what strings attached. Having failed to raise enough cash to rescue his prostitute lover from a life on the streets, Juan has clearly had to rely upon the kindness of strangers, which wouldn't be so bad except that the gentlemen in question look like Notre Dame gargoyles come to life. Lucky for Juan, Hans's father dashes to the rescue with plane tickets back to Paris, so all's well that ends well (except for the creepy gargoyles, who must have been *very* disappointed...).

The moral of story (and there is a moral, amazingly for a Franco film) is that young people should take care not to embrace the shackles of maturity without first enjoying the carefree pleasures of youth. Kind of like The Specials song, "Too Much Too Young". Okay, it's not a message the Catholic Church would endorse, but it's a word to the not-yet-wise about premature responsibility: Juan tries to turn a prostitute's life around with barely a nickel to his name, Juanita almost gets hitched to a much older man whose maturity seems alluring after the callous young bucks she's encountered, and Hans almost misses out on the fact that he's attractive to women because he spends too much time reading Voltaire.

Despite the sense of fun, Franco cannot help but include one of his increasingly tasteless rape scenes (a trend that kicked off with *99 Women* and reaches its peak with the stunningly amoral

molestation scenes in *La noche de los sexos abiertos* and *Las orgías inconfesables de Emmanuelle*). Okay, this time it's only *attempted* rape – but played for *fun*? Three horny lunkheads make *la vida* a bit too *loca* for sexy young Juanita, who fends off their evil intentions by dangling by her fingers from a third floor balcony. What japes! Never mind, she ends up firm friends with her 'suits' – until the carnival atmosphere erupts into a Bacchanalian frenzy and the tearaways try to gang rape her again! Just as well the ringleader's dad comes home early – phew – otherwise barely legal Juanita would have ended up as a carnival spit-roast! I know, I sound insensitive, but this is the way Franco chooses to play the scene.

If I were to switch moods as capriciously as Franco, I might end this broadly appreciative review by saying that *Las chicas de Copacabana* is the work of a director who, after a decade making ever-more explicit erotica, is beginning to lose sight of what sexual aggression is like in the real world, as opposed to the fantasy sexorama he sees down his viewfinder. Maybe I'm being corrupted too, though, because despite the bad taste of that particular scene I regard *Las chicas de Copacabana* as one of Franco's warmest and gentlest films...

Cast and crew: Playing Juan, the film's handsome young romeo, is Leonardo Melo Acosta, credited variously as 'Leonardo Da Costa', 'Leonardo Costa' or 'Melo Costa'. It's the first of his three roles for Franco: he's also a member of the doomed rescue team in *Devil Hunter* (1980) and a blind guitarist working for a villainous Sadean couple in *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* (1980). He was introduced to Franco by director of photography and fellow Lisbon resident Juan Soler. Although he'd lived in Portugal for many years, Acosta was actually born in Uruguay. After his brief spell working for Franco he took residence in Paris, until the early years of this century when he moved to Chile.

Connections: Hans's college coursework is a literary thesis on the French writer Voltaire, and the choice of author is not insignificant. Voltaire's most famous work, *Candide*, is a comic novel about a young man whose sheltered life and optimistic outlook are shattered as he witnesses the horrors and hardships of the wider world. Dealing with the theme of disillusionment, using sarcastic wit and satire in a way that may have influenced De Sade, *Candide* is subtly echoed in the overall theme of Franco's film, with its young people moving from carefree recklessness to sad awareness that things don't always turn out for the best in the best of all possible worlds...

Music: I guarantee that the theme tune, a jaunty little samba *sans merci*, will circle around in your head for days...

Locations: The majority of the film was shot in Lisbon and the Portuguese town of Sesimbra, standing in for Brazil. Additional scenes were filmed in Paris, and a few brief sequences were shot by Franco in Rio de Janeiro itself (this being his first South American shoot since *X312 – Flight to Hell* in 1970). Juan Soler remarks, "*the Rio shoot was only Jesus and Lina and the protagonists, Leonardo Melo Acosta and Michelle Hermet. They hired a small team there to do the extra shots. Probably only assistant camera and production.*"

THE SADIST OF NOTRE DAME

(English-language export title)

Spain & France, 1979

French visa no: 50821

Spanish depósito legal no: M-6148-1979

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

El sádico de Notre Dame (SP)

Le sadique de Notre-Dame (FR)

Alternative titles

Vicieuses pour un sadique (French visa title)

Deviants for a Sadist

Demoniac (US video)

Ripper of Notre Dame (US alt. video)

Le Meutrier de Notre-Dame (FR video)

The Murderer of Notre-Dame

Demoniac, el exorcista diabólico (SP video)

Demoniac, the Diabolical Exorcist

O Exorcista Diabólico (POR DVD)

The Diabolical Exorcist

L'éventreur de Notre Dame (shooting title)

The Ripper of Notre Dame

Production companies

Eurociné (Paris)

Triton P.C. (Madrid)

Theatrical distributors

Eurociné (Paris)

Gold International Films S.A. (Spain)

Timeline

Original <i>Exorcism</i> shoot	January-February	1974
<i>Sadist</i> footage shot	early February	1979
French visa issued	20 February	1981
France	08 July	1981
Madrid	14 September	1981
Cartagena	31 March	1982
Barcelona	12 July	1982
Seville	25 March	1983

Theatrical running times

France	99m
Spain	90m

Video/DVD/Blu-ray running times (converted)

Dutch 'Eagle 6' PAL VHS	98m55s
SP 'TJE Video' PAL VHS	98m38s
Severin Blu-ray	98m53s

director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Marius Lesoeur** [as A.L. Mariaux'], **Jess Franco** [as 'Jeff Manner']. production manager [Paris]: **Marius Lesoeur**. photography: Raymond Heil [actually **Jess Franco** and **Juan Soler Cózar**]. camera operator: **R. Zaldy**. assistant director: **Jean Pierre Ducroux**. script-girl: **Ilona Kunesova**. special effects: **A. Molin**. music: **Daniel J. White**. executive manager: **Daniel Lesoeur**. laboratory: **Vitfer**. from Spanish print: 2nd camera operator: **Luis Fernandez Colombo**. stills: **Juan Soler Cózar**. production manager [Lisbon]: **Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo** [as 'Joaquín Domínguez']. production assistant: **Fernando Vidal Rubio**. art director: **Luis Vidal Rubio**. make-up: **Nicole Guettard**. editor: **Federico Vich**. costumes: **Angeles Nuñez**. sound recordist: **J. Orth**. boom: **Panier**. Spanish dubbing: **Magna Films, S.A.** sound engineer: **Tomas Del Barrio**.

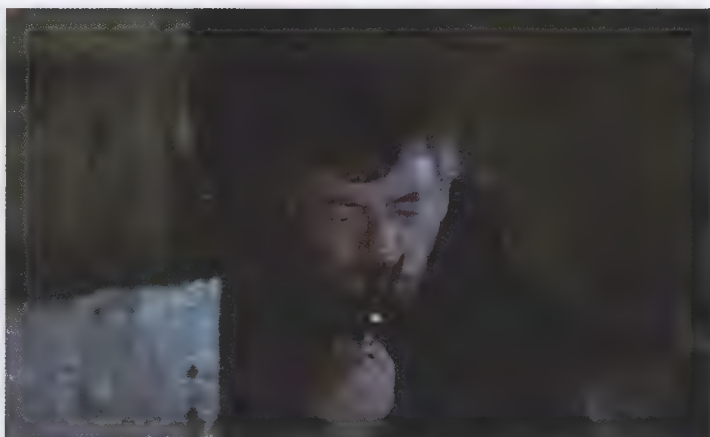
Cast: **Jess Franco** (Mathis Laforgue, 'Mathis Vogel'). **Lina Romay** (Anne). **Nadine Pascal** [as 'Nadine Pascale'] (first victim, a prostitute). **France Roche** [as 'Franco Nicolas'] (Countess Dicken). **Pierre Taylou** (Pierre de Franval). **Olivier Mathot** (Inspector Roché). **Francoise Guillard** (second victim, girl walking home). **Yul Sanders** (Bartolo, aka Richard Bartolowski Patton). **Monica Swinn** [as 'Monica Swinne'] (dominatrix). **Antonio De Cabo** (Father Raimond). *Uncredited:* **Roger Germanes** (Inspector Malou). **Lynn Monteil** (Rosie/Rose). **Caroline Rivière** (third victim). **Catherine Lafférière** (barmaid). **Ramón Ardid** (desk clerk). **Bigotini** (the count's manservant). **Claude Sendron** (Count Dicken). **Sam Maree** (Martin, man sharing bedroom with Countess).

Production notes: *The Sadist of Notre Dame* saw Franco returning to his bleak and bloody *Exorcism* (1974), adding twenty minutes of new material focussing chiefly on the character he had played himself; a religious lunatic who murders women to cleanse them of the sin of arousing him. The 'reboot' was a 50%-50% co-production between the Paris-based Eurociné and Spanish production company Tritón, although Franco seemed to get the facts a little mangled when he discussed the genesis of the project on the commentary track for Synapse's DVD release of *Exorcism*: "I was shooting films for a Spanish company, Plata Film. We made some co-productions with Germany, nice films, and he was a very nice guy as a producer. He had this film [*Exorcism*] he bought in the past, but he said to Lesoeur that he couldn't release it in Spain because of censorship. He said, would you like to develop more your character, I said yes, I'd love to!"¹ This is all fascinating, but as I've already stated, *The Sadist of Notre Dame* was co-produced by Tritón Films, not Plata Film! Franco made two films with Plata the following year (*Sadomania* and *Linda*) that were indeed co-productions with a German company (Lisa Film), so it's likely that Franco was mixing up the two companies in his memory. Either that, or the executive producer with whom he made the arrangements was involved with both Tritón and Plata Film.

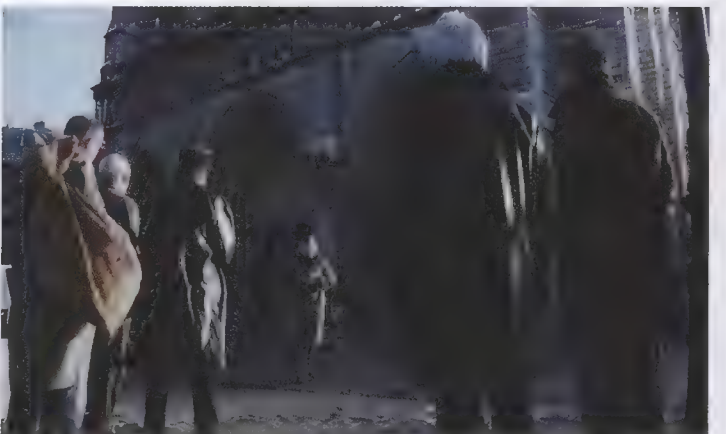
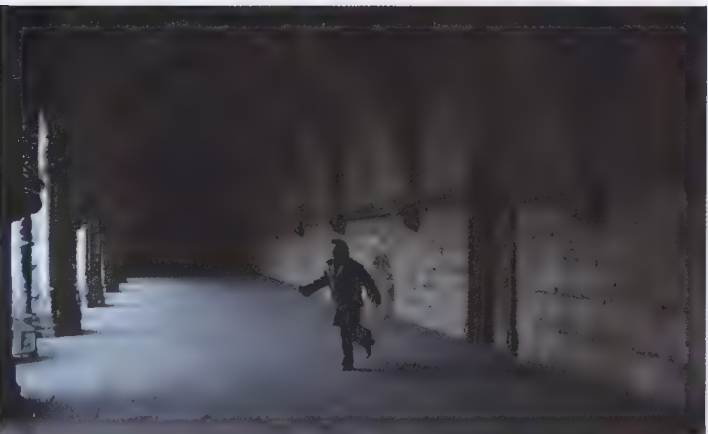
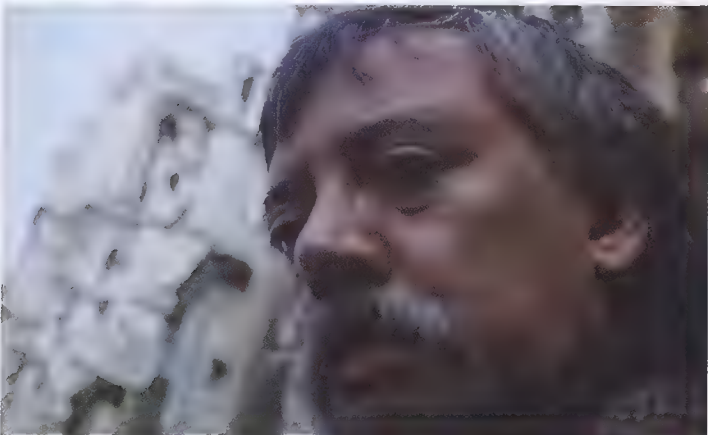
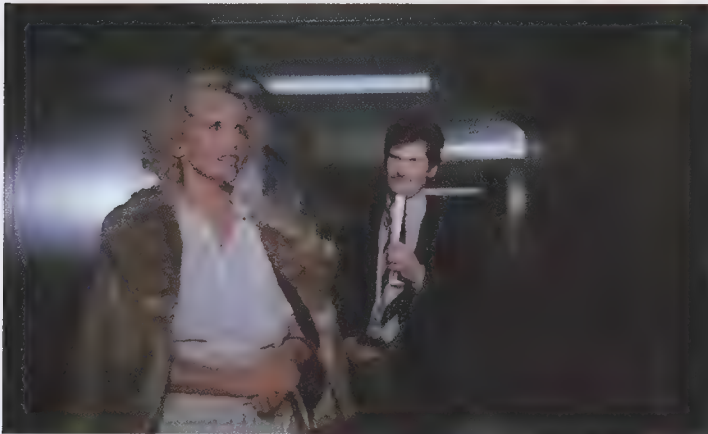
Confusion aside, *The Sadist of Notre Dame* is a major artistic success. On the *Exorcism* commentary track, Franco said that while working on the 1974 version he'd been told by Eurociné to cut back the character development of his murderous protagonist to make room for more sex. He therefore embraced the 1979 offer as a chance to correct this, and give his sick protagonist more screen time. Such was the quality of the new version that Franco (quite rightly in my opinion) regarded *The Sadist of Notre Dame* as the superior version of the film.

Review: Five years after the original *Exorcism* shoot, Franco was given the opportunity to shoot copious new material thanks to financial input from Spanish producers Tritón. In doing so he created what he staunchly regarded as the definitive version of the story. *The Sadist of Notre Dame* re-uses two-thirds of the footage from *Exorcism*, adds twenty-five minutes of new material, redubs the dialogue, shuffles the sequencing considerably, and sets the result to an entirely different score. Franco also renames several characters: murderer Paul Vogel becomes Mathis Laforgue to the police, and Mathis Vogel to his publisher; Raimond Franval becomes Pierre Franval; Mrs. Cartier becomes Countess Dicken; and *Exorcism*'s nameless Count is baptised 'Count Dicken'. But the biggest change is thematic, with Franco significantly amplifying the levels of Catholic perversion and hypocrisy. Vogel's past life as a defrocked priest – hinted at but never confirmed in *Exorcism* – is explicitly declared in *Sadist*. By yoking the killer to Notre Dame Cathedral, the most famous and imposing religious edifice in Paris, Franco ensures maximum anti-clerical bite, concentrating the notion that Catholicism is a breeding ground for sickness.

The Sadist of Notre Dame opens with approximately twenty minutes of new footage. The mood is intensely downbeat, replacing the sexual frisson of *Exorcism* with an almost documentary chill. We see Mathis Laforgue (Franco) wandering among street bums and alcoholics in the backstreets of what we assume to be Paris (actually Lisbon) at six in the morning on a cold winter's day. Shabbily dressed, withdrawn, disconsolate, he seems both an observer and a participant in this dawn parade of misery. An old man pisses into the street as he walks, his face a wrinkled mask of alcohol-induced retardation. Surly workers hurl bags of refuse into a garbage truck. The streets look smelly and cold. This is the flip-side of metropolitan nightlife; the sights and sounds and smells awaiting those for whom the party has come to an abrupt and lonely end somewhere in the gutter. It's also an image of Man reduced to the level of walking garbage, in a meaningless world of dereliction. As the trash collectors drive away we cut to a shot of Notre Dame Cathedral. The credits roll over this gorgeous iconic building, but Franco chooses a gloomy, overcast day, and opts for dusk instead of daylight. The giant building is a shadow against the sky, a dark slab looming over Paris, and Franco's camera regards it apprehensively, gazing up from a low angle near the pavement. Rather than emphasising beauty or the possibility of refuge, Franco shows this grand Catholic edifice as an oppressive force, towering



TOP ROW: A dominatrix (Monica Swinn) and her john (Claude Sendron) ... a prostitute (Nadine Pascal) falls victim to Laforgue (Jess Franco) on the banks of the Seine.
REMAINING PICTURES: Jess Franco as religious maniac, misogynist and social derelict Mathis Laforgue.



TOP ROW: Franco's acting credit ... Father Raimond (Antonio De Cabo). SECOND ROW: Pierre de Franval (Pierre Taylou) and Countess Dicken (France Roche). Laforgue stabs a victim. THIRD ROW: Laforgue wanders the streets of Paris. BOTTOM ROW: Laforgue seeks sanctuary in the Cathedral but finally surrenders to the police.

like a tombstone. For Franco, the Church has no answers to the problems of the human spirit.

Intercut with the image of Notre Dame is a single close-up of a human eye. The killer's eye; Franco's eye. After the credits, we see Laforgue walking through the streets of Paris, past sex shops and bars and cafés. It's a drab, rainy day. Parked cars clutter the curbs, shuffling figures crisscross the camera's gaze, a dead sky presses down. The camera tracks backwards to watch Laforgue as he walks the streets, regarding him rather as Kubrick does his protagonists, with the fatal knowledge of their downfall. There's a wonderful moment as Franco imitates the rubbernecking passers-by who've noticed the camera in the car in front of him. Gazing around him as though looking for movie stars too, just like any Joe Schmoe who spots a movie camera, he cleverly ensures that no one looks at him. The angle then switches and we observe Laforgue from a car prowling slowly behind him, driven by a young woman (Nadine Pascal). Laforgue accepts her offer of a lift, but when her apparent kindness is revealed as the opportunism of a hooker spotting a potential mark he attacks and kills her, doing the ugly deed on the twilit banks of the Seine. Later that same night, he's eager to kill again. His next victim makes the mistake of leaving a nightclub with two men, both of whom refuse to escort her home. Laforgue, spying unsympathetically from a doorway, sees not a damsel in distress but a painted Jezebel fresh from a ménage à trois in a disco passion-pit. Tracking her through the cobbled streets he attacks and slices her mercilessly while raving about sin and "*the redeeming hand of the Lord*".

At this point we hook up with the plot of *Exorcism*. However, changes have been made throughout, beginning with the dialogue in Laforgue's first visit to 'Editions Venus', publishers of sado-porn paperbacks and procurers of women for 'Satanic' orgies on behalf of a local aristocrat. There are numerous small alterations. Whereas in *Exorcism* Vogel was already known to the company, here he's approaching them for the first time. He also has a more considered reason for choosing such an insalubrious magazine; he's attracted by their large circulation, a detail that casts him as a man with a mission, a proselytiser, rather than a simple pervert and hypocrite. His evasive response to Anne's questions about his religious background, and Raimond (now Pierre)'s quip that he should write a piece called 'Memoirs of an Unfrocked Priest', have been dropped. Did Franco decide that these lines foreshortened the narrative? Personally I miss them; they suggested that Vogel's secrets were vulnerable to his cynical, worldly-wise publisher.

Exorcism's opening scene, a prolonged 'satanic sex ritual' involving two young women, concludes with the revelation that what we've seen was just an S&M sex show. Franco drops this scene entirely from *The Sadist of Notre Dame*, a decision which changes the audience's outlook on the characters and casts a more sinister light on dialogue between Anne and Pierre as they discuss Count Dicken's request for virgins to sacrifice at his forthcoming black mass. In *Exorcism*, the eavesdropping killer believes he's hearing plans for a genuine black mass, while we are already aware that

the team at 'Editions Venus' merely fake these 'occult rites' for fun and profit. In *Sadist*, however, both the killer and the audience are unaware that what's being discussed is simply an S&M show with Satanic trimmings...

After an amusing new scene in which Laforgue wanders obliviously down the middle of a street blocking a car, there comes another major alteration. In *Exorcism*, during the torture and murder of Gina, a nightclub dancer (played by Franco's adult stepdaughter Caroline Rivière), the killer transferred the terrified woman from the bed into a bound position against the wardrobe, where she suffered further torment and a final stab wound. In *Sadist*, Franco cuts away after she's stabbed on the bed, omitting two minutes of abuse. Clearly the result of Tritón's involvement and the need to secure a certificate for Spanish release (this being the year before the 'S' certificate came into force in Spain), the loss of these shots is regrettable, but don't let it put you off: *The Sadist of Notre Dame* is not only more coherent but also generally nastier in tone than *Exorcism*.

The satanic sex show hosted by the Count and Countess Dicken remains broadly the same in both *Exorcism* and *Sadist*, although the tedious orgy which follows is 35 seconds shorter in the English-language version of *Sadist* and a blessed 1m39s shorter in the Spanish. A word of explanation here: having reshuffled the storyline, Franco renamed the character played by France Nicolas, transforming her in the dubbing from Mrs. Cartier (*Exorcism*) to Countess Dicken (*The Sadist of Notre Dame*). Her husband in *Exorcism* becomes her adulterous lover in *Sadist*. (Got that? Good – it took me three viewings to work it out!)

An important additional subplot sees Laforgue visiting Notre Dame Cathedral to confess his crimes to an old friend in the priesthood (played by Antonio de Cabo). From the priest we learn that Laforgue has been incarcerated in an insane asylum for several years. There's also a re-dubbed dialogue scene between Pierre and Rose in a café by the Seine, in which Rose jokes that Pierre is the Notre Dame killer, to which he responds, "*Maybe I am, but not if you talk so loud – we're right across from the criminal court!*" His response emphasises his frivolous attitude to the killings, and has the additional virtue of contextualising an otherwise random zoom into the building opposite. I have to say, though, that I rather miss Pierre/Raimond's original line here from *Exorcism*: "*The motive behind these murders has got something to do with our quest for excitement in the domain of black magic!*"

The café scene is followed, soon after, by a conversation between Pierre and the Countess (herself a budding author of sadistic erotica) in the corridor outside Pierre's office. She expresses her regret, no doubt widespread among the modern aristocracy, at having been born too late to enjoy the sadistic pleasures her ancestors practised so freely in medieval times. Eavesdropping on the conversation is Laforgue, who waits until the Countess has departed before accusing Pierre of corrupting women and ranting about the end of days. Pierre calls him mad, realising at last that Laforgue is truly 'far out' and probably dangerous. Interestingly,

this scene was definitely filmed during the original *Exorcism* shoot in 1974 – the clothes and hair all match – although it's not present in any version of *Exorcism* I've seen. The dialogue was re-dubbed for use in *Sadist*, however, because France Nicolas is referred to as Countess here, not Mrs. Cartier.

The Sadist of Notre Dame pulls focus on *Exorcism*'s blurry narrative, but it doesn't achieve 100% clarity. In fact some of Franco's changes create new problems. For instance, when Pierre is interviewed by the police, who are seeking information about Laforgue, it's difficult to see why they've brought him in for questioning because there's no way they could know he's acquainted with the killer. In *Exorcism* he's interviewed by the police because his business card was found among the murdered Cartiers' possessions. In the reshuffled storyline of *Sadist*, however, these murders have not yet taken place, therefore the police have no reason to suspect him. Sergeant Malou's line, "*We know you know him – he came to see you a couple of days ago*" is a complete non-sequitur; there's been no indication that the police were tracking either Laforgue or Pierre's movements up to this point. (The line indicates that Franco was aware of the inconsistency and tried to paper over the cracks.) It's much later, after the murder of Monica Swinn's dominatrix (retained in both versions of the film), that we see the Cartier/Dicken murders. The police only receive a direct clue to Laforgue's whereabouts when a vagrant previously pulled in as a suspect spots Laforgue coming out of Notre Dame Cathedral and recognises him as the killer. He helps the police as a thank-you for the inspector letting him go earlier: "*Even bums have their uses Inspector*," he remarks, before saying of Laforgue "*He's no bum – he's some kind of church freak*."

Meanwhile, just as in *Exorcism*, Rose and Pierre confront Laforgue themselves rather than alert the police. Rose accuses Laforgue of abducting Anne, while Pierre, noting Laforgue's squeamish response to sex, goadingly mentions that they'll be having another 'wild party', adding, "*You want to join us? There'll be another mass, at the usual place. Why don't you come and celebrate with us tonight...*?" In a film full of nihilistic characters, it's debatable who is the worst, the clearly deranged Laforgue or the cynical and callous Pierre, who invites a man he feels sure is a serial murderer to attend his phony black mass, even though the killer probably murdered his friend! Likewise, Count Dicken has obviously spent little time grieving over his murdered wife, since he's going ahead with a sex party the next day! Even Rose, who was supposedly Anne's best friend, won't give up her Satanic folly and go to the police; in the absence of the murdered Countess, she's the replacement priestess at the ceremony. With friends like these, who needs Satan?

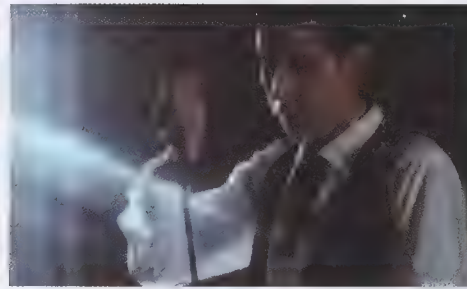
The climax of *Sadist* is darker, quieter and more satisfying than *Exorcism*. In the 1974 film Anne was saved by the police, who arrived at the chateau and shot the killer. In *Sadist* she's less fortunate, and Laforgue flees to Notre Dame Cathedral where he is refused absolution and told to hand himself over to "*the wrath of man*". *Exorcism* ended with an unconvincing shoot-out; *Sadist*

ends with Laforgue giving himself up to the police outside the Cathedral. We're left to mull over a vision of humanity as either selfish and decadent, or murderous and hypocritical. The police are defined solely by their problem-solving role (their jokey banter is reduced from the original cut), and even the bum who spots Laforgue and gives the police their lead does so because he feels obliged to repay a perceived debt, not because he wants to stop the killer. In this amoral world, Laforgue is the ultimate no-no – not because murdering women is inherently wrong, but because of his phony claims to a higher moral purpose. *The Sadist of Notre Dame* leaves us with a bleak portrait of reprehensible humanity, and the knowledge that Laforgue is simply returning to the madhouse from which he escaped. All that is left is sadness, and the chill of encroaching nightfall.

Music: Daniel White's music hovers between the frivolous and the morose, the key element being a pretty melody first heard over the shots of Laforgue roaming the Paris streets. Carrying within it a sort of fatalistic shrug, as if 'prettiness' is just a side-effect of darkness, it's the sort of ironic musical gesture that really helps to sell the film's mood. Two gloweringly sombre pieces for church organ were taken from a library LP featuring White's music, called *Grandes Orgues De Notre Temps* (1976). Franco referred to these pieces when I met him in 2010: "*Daniel White had such a facility to write music. We would meet at an address on the Champs-Élysées, and at the same time he would be writing a piece of music for my next film – and talking to me at the same time! And smoking a cigar! All at the same time. Daniel was an organ player of great ability, he worked with symphony orchestras. He lived near a Church in Paris, in the Latin Quarter, and Daniel was a very close friend of the organist of the church, and he always had permission to go in to play and to record.*"² ... Elsewhere, jaunty jazz numbers play over linking shots such as Anne and Rose walking across the Seine, or the arrival of guests to the Count's chateau, while the more horrific scenes are scored to the Arp Solina string synthesiser and electric piano, a White combo familiar from other films of the period such as *Shining Sex* (1975) and *Aberraciones de una mujer casada* (1980).

Locations: The additional locations in *Sadist* are as follows: the opening scenes with Laforgue among the destitutes were filmed not in Paris but in and around the Julio de Matos asylum, Lisbon, by Juan Soler. The scenes set inside Notre Dame Cathedral were also shot in Lisbon by Soler, at the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos, as there was no way to get permission to shoot inside Notre Dame itself. (Antonio De Cabo, who plays the priest, was in Lisbon at the time directing for the theatre and agreed to play the role while Franco was in town for a couple of days.) After the exterior shots of Notre Dame Cathedral beneath the credits, shot from the vantage of the Pont au Double, we shift to nearby Rue Nicholas Flamel, with the Tour Saint Jacques visible at the end of the street. Turning right onto Rue de Lombard, Laforgue walks towards Rue de la Verrerie and the junction with Rue Saint Martin. He is propositioned at the junction with Rue Saint Martin, where Rue de la Verrerie becomes Rue de Lombard. The first victim is stabbed to death on





Seven images from *Sinfonía erótica*: TOP ROW, L TO R: Armando (Armando Salient) and his lover Flore (Mel Rodrigo) taunt Martine (Lina Romay).

Armando responds badly when Flore develops feelings for Norma ... Flore and Armando have sex as the horrified Martine looks on.
MIDDLE ROW, L TO R: Flaws in the glass create ripples in a bleached out vista, through a window at the Palacio de Seteais ... A shot filmed through a lightbulb creates an abstract play of light and form ... Martine, kept in the dark by her callous husband, lives in a world of blur and shadow.

MAIN PICTURE: Flore and Armando demonstrate their homosexual love for one another by – how else? – raping a teenage nun (Susan Hemingway).

the stairs leading down to the river on the Ile de la Cité side of Pont au Double. The nightclub from which Laforgue's second victim emerges is Le Splendid, originally at 10 Rue des Lombards, now on Rue du Faubourg Saint-Martin. Le Pavé, the restaurant from which Laforgue spies on her, is still going strong on the junction of Rue des Lombards and Rue Nicolas Flamel.

SINFONIA ERÓTICA

(Spanish theatrical/USA Blu-ray)

Spain & Portugal, 1979

Spanish depósito legal no: M-6150-1979

Alternative titles

Sinfonia erotica (IT video)

Sinfornia Erotica (SWE video)

Cuerpos y almas (shooting title reported in OB) *Bodies and souls*

Cuerpo y alma (shooting title reported in MF)

No Portuguese release on record

Production companies

Tritón P.C. (Madrid)

Estudio-8, Ltda. (Lisbon)

Distribution companies

Barcino Films S.A. (Spain)

Portuguese distributor unknown

Timeline

Shooting date	Autumn	1979
Barcelona	14 April	1980
Madrid	05 May	1980
Seville	21 July	1980
Murcia	03 October	1980

Theatrical running time

Spain	84m
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Blu-ray running time

USA 'Severin' Blu-ray	84m
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director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**, based on texts by the **Marquis De Sade**. executive producer: **Joaquín Domínguez**. director of photography: **Juan Soler**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. original music: **Jess Franco**. "Concierto no 4 for Piano and Orchestra" by **Franz Liszt**. production manager: **Óscar Cruz**. assistant director: **Fernando Vidal Rubio**. script supervisor: **Luis Vidal Rubio**. 2nd camera operator: **Lionel Efe**. assistant

camera: **Fernando Dos Santos**. assistant production: **Antonio Monteiro**. stills photography: **María Valadas**. set decorator: **Nicole Guettard**. costumes: **Angeles Nuñez**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. sound recording: **Estudios Magna Films**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candice Coster'] (Martine De Bressac). **Armando Sallent** [as 'Armando Borges'] (Marquis Armando De Bressac). **Mel Rodrigo** (Flore). **Susan Hemingway** (Norma, the nun). **Aida Gouveia** (Wanda, the maid). **Albino Graziani** (Doctor Louys). **George Santos** (Georges, Armando's servant).

Synopsis: *The rich but deeply unhappy Martine De Bressac is hopelessly in love with her libertine husband, the Marquis Armando De Bressac, despite the fact that he recently had her committed to a mental institution in order to devote more time to his male lover, Flore. Discharged from the hospital by the sympathetic Doctor Louys, Martine returns home to the Palace of Tarise and finds that her husband is as inattentive as ever, and has now established Flore in the household and his bed. One afternoon, Flore and Armando find Norma, a young nun, unconscious in the grounds of the palace. They bring her to the house and ravish her. The girl is forced to stay and take care of Martine. For a while, the two women bond, but then Norma falls under the spell of Flore, who professes his love for her. Despite feeling guilty, Norma joins in with the victimisation of Martine. When Armando realises that his male lover is now infatuated with Norma, he decides not only to get rid of his wife but also to punish Flore's betrayal. Meanwhile, Doctor Louys, having been alerted to the goings on at the Bressac house by the family's maid, Wanda, sets in motion his own response to the tragedy of Martine...*

Production notes: As the darkening leaves on the trees suggest in the opening credits, *Sinfonia erótica* was shot in the Autumn of 1979. The schedule and location also provided Franco with the opportunity to grab scenes for his revised version of *Ópalo de fuego*, aka *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*.

Review: Marking Franco's only foray into the fully bisexual aspects of the Marquis De Sade, *Sinfonia erótica* takes a single segment from the author's novel *Justine*, namely the De Bressac encounter, and mixes it with elements from the same writer's short story "Eugénie De Franval". Like Franco's earlier *How to Seduce a Virgin*, *Sinfonia erótica* depicts Sadean libertines who feel no love for anyone but themselves, and whose alliances are contingent on self-interest and riddled with secret loathing. All of the characters lie and cheat and plot behind each other's backs, and the director observes these monsters dispassionately, with only the unfortunate Martine De Bressac, wife to a cold and contemptuous homosexual, regarded with sympathy.

Partly because of the period setting, and partly because of the score by Liszt, *Sinfonia erótica* possesses a unique aura for a Franco film: a feeling of class, wealth and sophistication, which inspires Franco to flights of visual poetry whilst at the same time seeming to mock the misery of its central character, who may as well be fighting

for her life among the dregs of the gutter for all the comfort and easeful luxury her surroundings afford her. Nevertheless, *Sinfonia erótica* falls on the 'sympathetic' side of the line in Franco's work, that line being the division between the celebration of sadistic jouissance and a kind of melancholic pity for the victims.

It's an odd flavour to introduce in a film like this; *Sinfonia erótica* draws narrative elements from De Sade, but they are contradicted by a misplaced sympathy for the tiresome Mrs. Bressac. In a cast full of monsters, Martine suffers because she embraces her victimhood, allowing love to become a masochistic imperative. I wonder whether Franco was aiming for an especially subtle form of black humour, akin to Sade's glowing testimonials to the fortitude of his victims, testimonials which are in fact gloatingly insincere, a refined sort of knife-twisting. If so, he slightly misjudges the ingredients: despite the hints of mockery, Martine ends up a figure of pity, I think because Franco cannot bring himself to celebrate the homosexual trickster in this tale, Armando De Bressac. His Sadean women are loci of perverse admiration: Armando is simply a creature whom Franco observes, a machine-part in the trap ensnaring Martine. Wanda, the maid who tries to intervene for her lady's sake, voices a bourgeois sense of right and wrong; she's judgemental about Flore's 'perversion' and thus she's the mouthpiece of a sanctimonious piety, for which Sade would have had nothing but contempt. The problem is that no one counters her judgement in the film; the male libertines, for instance, are not given the aggressive loquaciousness typical of Sade's characters. What's needed is a visiting Dolmance figure (Dolmance being the mouth-piece of Sade himself in his novel *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, as played by Christopher Lee in Franco's 1969 film *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*). Either that, or Armando himself ought to occupy that rhetorical position. Instead, the murderous passion of the character is depicted at arm's length, and it's hard to avoid the impression that the reason for this is his homosexuality. This philosophical lacuna means that *Sinfonia erótica* fails to meet the challenge of Sade's sexual omnivorousness. Homosexuality is presented as a threat to the happiness of bourgeois marriage, with the Marquis De Bressac seduced by a fey young male who inveigles his way into the marital mansion. There is no sense in which homosexual desire, as per Sade, is recognised as a sovereign state of eroticism; it's simply an obstacle to the wilting heroine's happiness.

On a more positive note, *Sinfonia erótica* is a technical and delirious *tour-de-force*, boasting the most sustained use of spatially disorientating soft-focus close-ups so far in Franco's career. The use of light in particular is striking and inventive, with many shots allowing intense sunshine to overload the camera. If the aim is to represent the fragile, confused mind of the unfortunate Martine then the job is beautifully done. One observes characters swimming through the gloom of the Bressac chateau like wraiths seen under the influence of a rapidly encroaching anaesthetic. By limiting the cast to seven people, and rarely allowing any of them to escape the stifling unhappiness of the mansion's interior,

Franco locks us into a morbid prison that may look like a palace but, like the castle of Dr. Fisherman in *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, brings no one any pleasure. Music and image repeatedly converge into hallucinatory paroxysms, abstracting bodies, shadows, and details of opulent furnishings into a dream-space beyond rationality. The unlikely romance that seems set to blossom between Flore and Norma takes us outside into the mansion gardens, but their ill-crossed tenderness doesn't stand a chance against the claustrophobic horrors summoned elsewhere. (Only Franco could conceive a romance between a languidly feminine homosexual and a virginally uptight nun!) Even when the time comes for Martine to leave the house, it seems there's no escape: as she leaves with Doctor Louys, he remarks, oh-so-casually, "*We will be together with your fortune far away from here*". It would seem that even this noble and chivalrous character has more in mind than love and the well-being of his patient! In which case Martine's suffering is surely set to continue...

Cast and crew: Franco's marriage may have been over, but his ex-wife Nicole continued to visit him while he worked. She's credited with set decoration on *Sinfonia erótica*, editing on *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, *Eugénie, historia de una perversion* and *Devil Hunter*, and make-up on *Las chicas de Copacabana*, *The Sadist of Notre Dame* and *El lago de las vírgenes*. Antonio Mayans, however, states that she did not actually work on the films.

Music: Unusually in Franco's career, most of the music is drawn from the work of a prominent composer, Franz Liszt, although the credits misattribute the compositions used; there is no Fourth Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, it's the Second Concerto that's employed here. Alongside Liszt we're also treated to a prime selection of chilly synthesiser cues by Franco and Daniel J. White, accompanied by a feverish ghost-ride of echoes, cries, whimpers and moans.

Locations: The main location is the neoclassical Palacio de Seteais in Sintra, Portugal. Located in the winding forest roads above Sintra, and surrounded by expansive grounds and an ornamental garden, it has been a luxury hotel and restaurant since 1954. The incredible Palacio de Pena, perched on a high hilltop, can be seen in a couple of shots from the windows of the Palacio de Seteais. The horse-drawn buggy in which Lina Romay and Albino Graziani approach the palace in the opening shots is the property of the hotel, and visitors can still travel the grounds in this fashion today.

Other versions: An Italian video release reportedly features several small cuts from the Spanish version, and re-edits the soundtrack to remove many of the echoed cries and moans which do so much to carry the film's odd, hallucinatory mood. The re-dubbed dialogue also makes changes to the intended sense of the original, according to Franco scholar Francesco Cesari it is "often overacted and sometimes coarse" and "unsatisfying in comparison with the sobriety and intimacy of the Spanish..." The film should not be confused with *Symphonie érotique*, the French release title (from *Julietta 69* distributors Rex International) for Joe D'Amato's 1980 sex film *Blue Erotic Climax*.

EL ESCARABAJO DE ORO

translation: *The Gold Bug*

UNRELEASED

Spain, 1980

Alternative titles

Vaya luna de miel (SP print) *What a Honeymoon*

Production:

Magna Films (Spain)

Shooting date June 1979

director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Joaquín Domínguez**. writer: **Jess Franco**, based on a story by **Edgar Allan Poe**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. make-up: **Nicole Guettard**. music: **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. Colour. 35mm.

Cast: **Max H. Boulois**. **Lina Romay**. **Antonio Mayans**. **Emilio Álvarez**.

Production notes: Based on “The Gold Bug”, a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, *El escarabajo de oro* was shot by Franco in Rio de Janeiro in May 1979, with further material filmed in Elche (Spain) in June 1979, at which point Antonio Mayans rejoined the Franco troupe for the first time since *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* in 1973. Franco always spoke highly of the film, but sadly it was never released: “El escarabajo de oro exists, it is a finished film, but the producer, a strange man, owner of a dubbing studio, never marketed it. It’s a very modern version, in the style of an eccentric comedy.”¹

The star of the film was Max H. Boulois, a sportsman turned journalist and disco artist who made three films in the early 1980s; the *Hounds of Zaroff*-influenced *The Big Game* (1980), a gambling picture starring Peter Cushing called *Black Jack* (1981), and *Othello, the Black Commando* (1982), an adaptation of the Shakespeare play starring Bulois in the title role and Tony Curtis as Iago! Franco would return to the Poe story for *En busca del dragón dorado* (1983) and the ill-fated *Jungle of Fear* (1993) ... Alongside Romay and Mayans, the only other actor known to have been involved is Emilio Álvarez, the teenage star of Amando de Ossorio’s steamy incest drama *Pasión prohibida* (1982). Telling the story of a young woman who becomes erotically obsessed with her younger brother (Álvarez), the Ossorio film is not unlike some of the work Franco was doing in the early 1980s, sharing a ‘sunshine and sleaze’ vibe with such films as *Sadomania* (1981) and *Linda* (1981).

Locations: Rio De Janeiro, Alicante, Elche, Benidorm.

Other versions: In 2018, Alex Mendibil discovered a pristine negative of this film in the archives of the Filmoteca Español, under the alternative title *Vaya luna de miel*. As of publication, it is not yet available on DVD or Blu-ray.

THE CANNIBALS

(UK DVD title)

France, Spain, West Germany [& Italy?], 1980

French visa no: 52347

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Les Cannibales (FR theatrical)

Alternative titles

Mondo Cannibal (FR alt. theatrical) *Cannibal World*

La déesse des barbares (FR alt. theatrical)

Goddess of the Barbarians

Mondo Cannibale (FR alt. theatrical – poster)

Mondo cannibales (FR alt. theatrical – stills title)

La dea cannibale (IT theatrical) *The Cannibal Goddess*

Cannibals (IT alt. theatrical poster/UK alt. video)

Une fille pour les cannibales (Belgian FR-lang theatrical)

A Girl for the Cannibals

Een meisje voor de kannibalen (Belgian Dutch-lang theatrical)

A Girl for the Cannibals

Mondo Cannibale 3 Teil Die blonde Göttin der Kannibalen

(WG theatrical) *MC3: blonde goddess of the cannibals*

Die weisse Göttin der Kannibalen (SWI theatrical)

The White Goddess of the Cannibals

Carnes humana (MEX theatrical) *Human Flesh*

L’Emprise des cannibales (FR video) *The Grip of the Cannibals*

Mangeurs d’hommes (FR video cover – sometimes confused with *Devil Hunter*, but the cover blurb is for *The Cannibals*)

White Cannibal Queen (US video)

Η ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ ΤΩΝ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΩΝ (Greek alt. video)

The Barbarian Queen

Barbarian Goddess (Greek English-language video)

Mondo Cannibale La déesse blonde (FR DVD)

Die blonde Göttin der Kannibalen (GER DVD)

The Blonde Goddess of the Cannibals

Inferno der Kannibalen (GER alt. DVD)

La Déesse Cannibale (shooting title)

Mondo Cannibal (shooting title [MF])

Rio salvaje (Spanish pre-production title)

Barbarian Goddess [sic] (Eurociné pressbook)

Unconfirmed titles

Déesse Blonde

La Déesse de la tribu perdu

Production companies

Eurociné (Paris)

Magna Films (Madrid)

Sirus International Films (Italy)

Titanic Film (Spain)



*Theatrical distributors***Eurociné** (Paris)**Hermes Films** (France) (*La déesse des Barbares* poster)**Scotia Distribution** (West Germany)**Filman** (Rome)*Timeline*

Shooting date	December	1979
German 18-certificate issued	28 November	1980
French visa issued*	20 October	1981
Lille, France (as <i>Mondo Cannibale</i>)	21 October	1981
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	20 January	1982
Aalst, Belgium	18 June	1982
Rome	22 June	1984
Albenga, Italy	11 October	1984

* or 52437 on the French theatrical print *Les Cannibales*.*Theatrical running times*

France	83m
Germany	90m14s

Video and DVD running times (converted)

UK 'Cinehollywood' PAL VHS version	90m19s
UK 'Serpent' PAL VHS version	81m44s
UK 'EVC' PAL VHS version	89m50s
UK 'Screen' PAL DVD	90m19s

Note: Despite Spanish production involvement there is currently no evidence that the film was ever released in Spain.

confirmed credits:

director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Marius Lesoeur**. director of photography: **Luis Durá Colombo** [as 'L. Colombo']. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. music: **Daniel White & Jess Franco**.

unconfirmed or contradictory credits:

from *Les Cannibales* screen credits: screenplay: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'H.L. Rostaine', or from *Les Cannibales* press-sheet: 'A.L. Mariiaux']. adaptation: **Jess Franco**. assistant director: **Olivier Mathot** [as 'Claude Plaut']. script supervisor: **Iлона Kunesova**. production managers: **Daniel Lesoeur**, **Joaquín Domínguez** [as 'Joachim Doming']. special effects: (1) **Karl Manner** or (2) **Michael Nizza** [from *Les Cannibales* press-sheet] or (3) **J. Weissmuller** [from IT version *La dea cannibale*] or (4) **Mike Mallows** [from *La déesse des barbares* press-sheet]. make-up: **Nina Orlando**. sound: **Claude Panier**. titles & opticals: **Technilabs**. additional credits from *La dea cannibale*: art director: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.L. Marioux']. assistant director: **Michel Melosena**. editor: (1) **Roland Grillon** or (2, from 'in production' listings) **Antonio Hermand**. special effects: **J. Weissmuller**. music: **Roberto Pregadio**. music publisher: **Nazionalmusic**. executive producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**.

from *Les Cannibales* press-sheet: set decorator: **Carlos Franco**. colour by Telecolor. from 'in production' listings: sound: **Jacques Orth**. *Uncredited elsewhere*: adapted from a story by **Jean Rollin**.

Cast: **Al Cliver** (Professor Jeremy Taylor). **Sabrina Siani** (Lena the White Goddess). **Anouchka Lesoeur** (Lena as a child). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Anna/Diana, Jeremy's nurse). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Forster'] (Yakaké, Lena's tribal lover). **Pamela Stanford** [as 'Pamela Standford'] (Elisabeth Taylor). **Shirley Knight** (Barbara Shilton). **Olivier Mathot** (Charles Fenton). **Jérôme Foulon** (Johnny, young Safari member). **Angel Caballero** (expedition guide). **Jess Franco** (Mr. Martin, a Portuguese businessman). *Uncredited*: **Gérard Lemaire** (boat captain). Italian poster adds: **Anne Marie Rosier**.

Synopsis: Professor Jeremy Taylor is on a scientific survey funded by the Shilton Foundation, travelling by boat down a Third World jungle river, accompanied by his wife Elisabeth and their young daughter Lena. The boat is attacked by savages and Elisabeth is eaten alive. Taylor is dragged ashore, and one of his arms is cut off at the elbow. Lena jumps overboard and is washed up on the shore, where the tribespeople find her and carry her back to the village. Taylor manages to escape and return to civilisation. However, the nightmare has affected his mind and he suffers from traumatic shock and amnesia. In New York, ten years after the horrific experience, Taylor's nurse Anna helps him to regain his memory, and when he remembers that his young daughter was captured and may still be alive, he approaches the Shilton Foundation for funds to return. Barbara Shilton and her lover Charles Fenton respond with derision to his story of cannibals, and refuse to assist, so Taylor tries to mount his own expedition. Back in the jungle, accompanied only by Anna, who has become his lover, Taylor finds he lacks the necessary funds to gather enough men. Fortunately, Barbara and Charles pop up again, informing him that they've changed their minds and will pay for an expedition as they rather fancy a jaunt into the jungle. Astonished at their casual attitude but glad of the finance, Taylor agrees, and a party of ten head off into the jungle. It's not long before they are being picked off one by one, by the same tribe that attacked and killed Taylor's wife. Taylor survives, along with Anna and a young man called Johnny, but they are captured and taken to the tribe's village, where Anna is attacked and eaten alive. Just as Taylor and Johnny despair for their lives, a beautiful blonde woman intervenes. She is the ruler of the tribe. Taylor recognises her as his daughter, now grown up, but Lena hardly recognises her father. Will she agree to leave the jungle and return to civilisation with her father and Johnny? Or will she stand by as the two men are eaten by the tribe that worships her?

Production notes: *The Cannibals* was the first of two films about tribal anthropophagy that Jess Franco made within six months of one another (see also *Devil Hunter*). In both cases the impetus came from his producers, and the intent was nakedly commercial, inspired by the stream of lucrative and notoriously violent cannibal movies coming out of Italy in the 1970s. Franco expressed no

enthusiasm for the subgenre when questioned about these films in interviews, and when he returned to jungle settings later, for *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* (1982) and *La esclava blanca* (1985), he dropped the flesh-eating angle altogether and played the stories purely as pulp adventures. So how did he come to make two films, so close together, in a genre for which he had such low regard? And which came first?

The cannibal horror subgenre began in Italy, with Umberto Lenzi's jungle adventure film *Deep River Savages* (1972). Lenzi would revisit the genre twice, for *Eaten Alive* (1980) and *Cannibal Ferox* (1981), but by then his crown as king of the jungle nasties had been claimed by Ruggero Deodato, who ramped up the intensity with the grisly *Last Cannibal World* (1976) and aced the trend with the biggest shocker of them all, *Cannibal Holocaust*, shot in April and May 1979 and released in February 1980. Three months before that date, in November 1979, Fabrizio De Angelis (producer of the Lucio Fulci hit *Zombie Flesh-Eaters*) commissioned a cannibal movie under the pre-production title *La regina dei cannibali* ("Queen of the Cannibals"). He hired Marino Girolami to shoot it, stirred in zombies to capitalise on the success of *Zombie Flesh-Eaters*, and released the film in Italy as *Zombi Holocaust* in March 1980, just a few weeks after *Cannibal Holocaust* came out. Did De Angelis rush his gut-munching opus into production after a tip-off about the forthcoming *Cannibal Holocaust*? Deodato's film was in post-production at De Paolis Studios in Rome during July/August 1979; *Zombie Flesh-Eaters*, coincidentally or not, was also assembled there at the same time. In the offices, studios and edit suites of De Paolis, gossip about *Cannibal Holocaust* must surely have been intense...

'Insider trading' is also likely to have inspired the precipitous announcement of a project called "The Cannibal", with Franco Prosperi attached as director. First proclaimed in the magazine *Italian Movie Trade* in October 1979, and followed up in *Variety*, the project stalled for several months, during which time Franco Prosperi defected and a second director came and went. As "The Cannibal" stumbled, French producers Eurociné decided to rush their own flesh-eating saga into production, with Jess Franco at the helm – and so *The Cannibals* was born. Marius Lesoeur, head of Eurociné, may have been inspired after hearing that the Prosperi film had stalled, or he may have picked up on industry gossip about the forthcoming *Cannibal Holocaust* at MIFED in Milan in October 1979. Either way, he was so confident that cannibalism was going to be a money-spinner that he bankrolled two cannibal films, to be made simultaneously: *The Cannibals* (aka *Les Cannibales*) directed by Franco, and *Cannibal Terror* (aka *Terreur cannibale*) directed by Alain Deruelle. As Franco later explained, "[Marius Lesoeur] asked me for permission to shoot, himself, with another crew at the same time as I was shooting my film."¹ This suggests that Lesoeur, who rarely directed, had intended to shoot *Cannibal Terror* himself, but then changed his mind. Perhaps he had second thoughts after recalling the problems he'd encountered on *Une cage dorée* in 1976? Franco, though not pleased to have a second production playing piggy-back

on his own, agreed to the arrangement as long as his name was not attached to the other project. With that understood, production on both films began simultaneously in December 1979.² Discussing *The Cannibals*, leading man Al Cliver said, "There was a kind of script. Three to five pages, that was the script. Every morning you got to read these pages, and we improvised a lot. The shooting lasted only two weeks."³ With such rapidity by now second nature to Franco, *The Cannibals* (and Deruelle's *Cannibal Terror*) would be ready in time for the Cannes Film Market in May 1980, thus stealing a march on "The Cannibal" which was yet to begin filming. (It eventually went into production in June 1980, with Jess Franco as director: see *Devil Hunter*). An article in *Variety* about the stallholders at the 1980 Cannes Film Market, dated 7 May 1980, stated: "Eurociné, headed by Daniel Lasoeur [sic], produced Pierre Chevalier's 'Convoi de Femme' [sic], Alan Steeve's 'Cannibal Terror', Jess Franco's 'Sadique de Notre Dame' and 'Les Cannibales'", thus placing *The Cannibals* firmly on the table for world sales, alongside Eurociné's other titles, in the late Spring of 1980.

Review: Time changes everything. At the very least it rots your brain and lets you enjoy *The Cannibals*, a film you may have seen long ago in the early days of video rental and dismissed as the lowest form of Eurotrash. My abiding memory of viewing this film, back in the 1980s, is of being revved up for a video nasty à la *Cannibal Ferox* or *Cannibal Holocaust*, and then staring in disbelief as the ultra-cheap 'cannibal attacks' played in flickery avant-garde slow motion while the soundtrack filled with echoed grunts and groans. The idea that one might possibly enjoy this ridiculous farrago never entered my head back then, but now it's different. I'm sitting here thinking, 'Wow, sounds great!' The lesson? Beware the catacombs of Eurotrash, they dissolve your mind and turn your wits to mush...

Anyway, I finally sat down and watched the film again, and I have to say I was entertained throughout. Whether as *The Cannibals*, or *Cannibals*, or *White Cannibal Queen*, or one of many other retitlings all over Europe and beyond, this over-exposed Franco film would hang around in the early days of video like the proverbial bad penny. But having now caught up with the kind of movies Franco really excels at, I can approach a piece of trash like *The Cannibals* with a bit more context and appreciation. Back in the 1980s, this was only the third Franco film I'd seen, which did it no favours at all. Encounter it too early and you'll probably see it purely as a failed attempt to do something other directors do better, whereas if you see it after the marvels of Lorna... the *Exorcist* or *Doriana Gray*, you can happily view it as a light-hearted semi-pisstake, a romp, a minor vacation into horror-action-adventure. True, it's the sort of thing Sergio Martino did better, but at least you don't have to watch a rhino-skinned Ursula Andress tottering around in swimwear.

For many viewers, the biggest stumbling block to enjoyment of this movie is the issue of plausibility. My advice is forget it – Franco has an artist's contempt for the plausible. He's more interested in



TOP ROW: Johnny (J rome Foulon) and the tour guide (Angel Caballero) realise the safari is not going well... Elisabeth Taylor (Pamela Stanford) is eaten by cannibals.
MAIN PICTURE: Sabrina Siani, as Lena the 'blonde goddess', with Yakak  the cannibal chief (Antonio Mayans).

the absurd, the bizarre, the ineffable. Plausibility is very low on his agenda: it's one step away from mundanity. He's a kind of poet of the unlikely. A film like Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* – the pinnacle of all cannibal films – goes to great lengths to convince viewers that what they're watching is 'real', using the techniques of 'cinema-verité' and muddily convincing gore prosthetics to make us wonder if perhaps we're seeing a real-life atrocity, perpetrated in the Amazonian jungle by sicko filmmakers, far from the disapproving eye of the city. Deodato even stooped to killing live animals before the cameras, hoping to convince us that the violence suffered by the human characters could be just as real. *The Cannibals*, on the other hand, takes plausibility behind the nearest bush and wrings its neck. Franco shamelessly stages his jungle japes in what looks suspiciously like a botanical garden. In the regulation 'we're-fucked-and-doomed' section of the film, in which Al Cliver and a gaggle of idiots get lost about a hundred yards from where they started, people stagger through undergrowth supposedly miles from civilisation while a few yards away we can see a neatly tended gravel path winding between the trees. It leads us to a reasonably effective scene set in the grounds of a crumbling palatial villa, with dead and mutilated white men tied to the trees, but if the area is so 'off-the-map' what is it doing there? We're presumably meant to think of it as some sort of colonialist haven on the fringes of the wild, where posh Caucasians sip G&Ts and duck the occasional blowdart, but who knows? Franco never bothers to explain. That's because we're not really anywhere, not in the geographical, look-it-up, Google-Earth sense. We're in some delirious netherworld of his own devising, a place where realism is a joke to be kicked around like a deflated football and abandoned in a ditch.

Picking up on the general air of irreverence, the dubbing actors have a ball with a plethora of atrocious accents (including some bizarre *Gone With the Wind* impressions). The actor voicing Olivier Mathot in the English version is having a whale of a time, pitching his character as a camp old dear who's utterly unable take this 'dangerous adventure' remotely seriously. "We're all mad to go on a cannibal hunt!" he trills. One of the girls suggests doing some filming with the movie camera: "Yes, why not!" he enthuses, "And with some clever editing we might get a tiger in too!" Stock footage jokes in a Eurociné production? Talk about 'postmodern'...

Then there are the cannibals. Extraordinary, in a 'Haight Ashbury for ghouls' sort of way, this cannibal tribe (actually gypsies from nearby Alicante) sport facepaints that appear to have been modelled on designs used by the Nuba tribes of the Sudan, as featured in Leni Riefenstahl's pioneering photographic collection *The Last of the Nuba* (1973). Since the paints probably came from an Alicante art shop, the effect is more garish and 'New Romantic' than authentically African, but then, as already noted, authenticity is rarely uppermost in Franco's mind. *The Cannibals* doesn't try and then fail to match the shocking violence or gritty realism of its Italian forebears. It's the work of a total iconoclast who's been asked to make a movie in a genre he dislikes, and who's decided to amuse himself with the material while offering just enough genre

'gravy' to pass it all off as horror. It's a heist movie, with the gullible producer as dupe. You could say the audience has been ripped off as well, and you may be right. But sometimes you have to applaud the criminal for his audaciousness. For me, the laughter inspired by *The Cannibals* more than makes up for the lack of nihilistic gore savagery. But like I said at the beginning, that's the passage of time for you...

Franco on screen: Franco plays a Portuguese businessman offering advice to the explorers in a roadside bar on the fringes of the jungle. When criticised by the hero for trading with the cannibals, his response, delivered with a certain vehemence, could almost be a meta-statement by Franco about the doldrums into which he'd sunk while working for Eurociné: "It may not be right, but it's all I know and I try to do it well. Trading with these people keeps body and soul together!"

Cast and crew: For fans of Italian horror, the presence of Al Cliver in *The Cannibals* sets up unrealistic expectations: Cliver (real name Pier Luigi Conti) was a regular for Italian horror maestro Lucio Fulci, most notably appearing in the bloodthirsty director's *Zombie Flesh-Eaters* and *The Beyond*. However, anyone hoping for Fulci-esque slaughter on the grand scale will be terribly let down. The few instances of gore in *The Cannibals* are either fleeting, or aestheticised into abstraction by the decision to film the gut-chewing 'pay-off' scenes in murky slow motion ... Luis Colombo, credited as director of photography here, and camera operator on Franco's *Devil Hunter*, went on to direct *Reir más es imposible* (1986), a comedy starring Antonio (*Tenemos 18 años*) Ozores, and *Commando Terrorista* (1990), an obscure Spanish action movie featuring Aldo Sambrell ... Ilona Kunesova, script girl on this and many other Eurociné productions, is the daughter of Daniel Lesoeur ... I can find no record of special effects man 'Karl Manner', nor editor 'Nina Orlando' elsewhere ... Alain Petit asserts that a man called Carlos Franco, credited as art director/set decorator on the *Les Cannibales* press-sheet, is in fact Jess's nephew ... There are two people called 'Joaquín Domínguez' whose names crop up in the credits on Franco's films of this period: one is Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo, executive producer and head of the Tritón company; the other is Joaquín Domínguez Jr., who is credited as a production assistant on Franco's Tritón production *El lago de las vírgenes* (1981). Various other Franco films of this period (including *The Cannibals*) credit someone called 'Joaquín Domínguez' as production manager or unit manager: these roles would fit Joaquín Domínguez Jr. far more than Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo, the latter of whom is too senior a figure to be handling day-to-day practicalities on the set of a Jess Franco movie. Production manager credits on films like *Devil Hunter*, *El sexo está loco* and *The Cannibals* therefore almost certainly belong to Joaquín Domínguez Jr., who is probably the son or nephew of the Tritón exec.

Music: The catchy score is credited to Roberto Pregadio, a veteran of the Italian cinema who provided music for, among many others, Franco Prosperi's *La Settima Donna* and Sergio Garrone's *SS Experiment Camp*. However, in the documentary which appeared

on the Blue Underground DVD of *The Cannibals*, Franco stated categorically that the music was composed by himself and Daniel White.

Locations: The ‘jungle expedition’ scenes were filmed at the Palmeral de Elche, a plantation of palm trees in the province of Alicante. It’s the largest palm grove in Europe, covering over three and a half square kilometres. The New York footage was borrowed from a documentary Franco obtained from the Spanish film archives.

Connections: Franco looked back to the same sources that inspired Joe D’Amato’s *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals* (1977) and Sergio Martino’s *Prisoner of the Cannibal God* (1978), namely the American adventure serials of the 1930s. In particular, he seems to have been channelling Robert Hill’s 12-part *Queen of the Jungle* (1935), about a little girl lost in a ballooning accident over the jungle (careless!) who is found by a native tribe and grows up to become their queen, before being rescued by an old friend who tries to bring her back to the parents she no longer remembers ... The fight between Al Cliver and Antonio Mayans, knee deep in the river battling for the love of the same woman, echoes a very similar situation in Franco’s 1963 quasi-Western *El llanero* ... The unusual slow-motion shots of cannibals chewing human flesh echoes a similar depiction of cannibalism in *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* ... As noted earlier, Alain Deruelle’s *Cannibal Terror* was shot on many of the same Spanish locations as *The Cannibals*, and Deruelle made use of Franco’s props, background performers, and some of the same cast (Pamela Stanford, Olivier Mathot, Antonio Mayans and Gérard Lemaire). He was also allowed to use a few identical shots from *The Cannibals* (namely images of the tribe running around and looming into camera for victim point-of-view shots, plus shots of a special-effects human torso with the limbs cut off and the stomach ripped open).

French theatrical release: *The Cannibals* didn’t exactly set the box office alight in France, something which must have irked Eurociné, since they took the unusual step of buying a full back-page colour advertisement in the trade paper *Le Film Français*: the 13 November 1981 edition is graced with the *Mondo cannibal* artwork of a machete-wielding savage standing astride a cringing white woman. But despite this uncharacteristically lavish expenditure, no further bookings appear to have been made: the only French release I’ve been able to find was a week in Lille, for which a disappointing 942 paying customers turned up. Whether the film played elsewhere is unclear, because the provincial listings in *Le Film Français* don’t include films attracting less than 800 attendees. It’s possible the film toured the regions playing to smaller audiences but it’s difficult to check without resorting to the local newspapers...

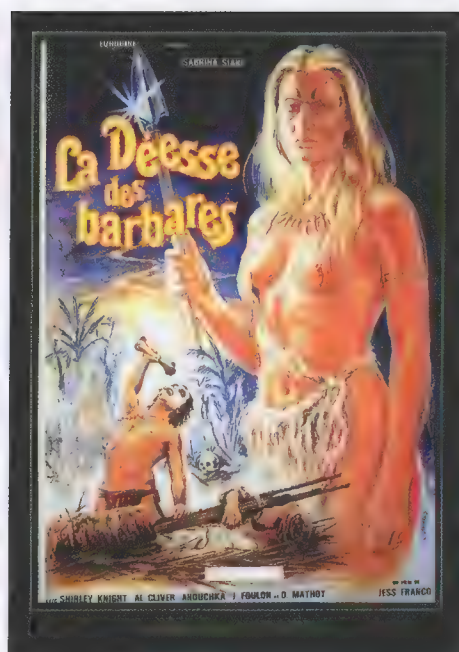
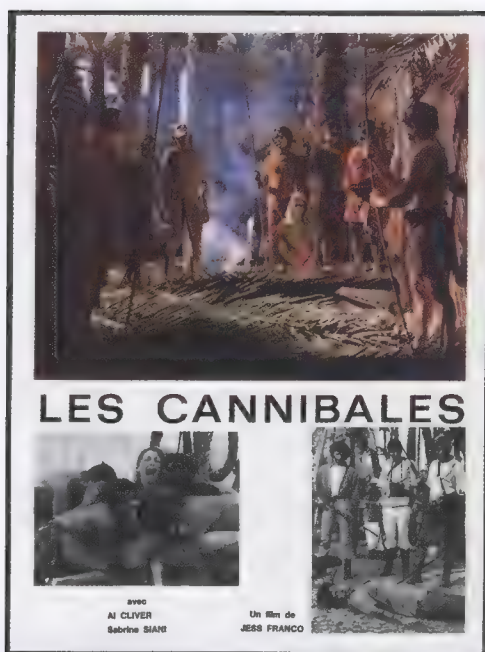
Other versions: *The Cannibals* was released and then re-released under a bewildering array of titles, three of them in France alone. The credits scattered across these multiple versions are a nightmare to decipher; some film prints and international posters even place Franco Prosperi in the director’s chair! As noted above,

Prosperi was the intended director of “The Cannibal”, a different production announced in the trade press in October 1979, which ended up being directed by Jess Franco in June 1980 when Prosperi dropped out (see *Devil Hunter*). Prosperi, however, never had anything to do with Eurociné’s *The Cannibals*, not even in pre-production – yet various film prints and international posters cite him as director. No wonder *The Cannibals* and *Devil Hunter* get mixed up in most reference works!

To make sense of it all, let’s begin by establishing the order in which the various ‘editions’ of *The Cannibals* were created. Given that the film was a Eurociné production, it’s reasonable to assume that the original is one of the three known French editions: either *Les Cannibales*, *Mondo Cannibal* or *La déesse des barbares*. I therefore nominate *Les Cannibales*, which has the more accurate and extensive onscreen production credits, and a 1980 copyright date. It is also referred to by name in *Variety*’s Cannes special on 7 May 1980. We can see this version today thanks to the French video release of the same name: the onscreen title card is consistent in design with the rest of the credits, so we can be sure that *Les Cannibales* was the title on the 35mm theatrical print, not a video retitling. After a disastrous reception at Cannes in 1980, where according to Alain Petit the film was laughed at by prospective buyers, *Les Cannibales* sat on the shelf for a while until Eurociné worked out what to do with it...

Fast forward a few months and the film reappears as *Mondo Cannibal*, with heavily truncated screen credits and an array of new promotional materials. Yes, the poster artwork carelessly disagrees with the onscreen title by referring to the film as ‘Mondo Cannibale’, and the accompanying stills make matters worse by calling it ‘Mondo Cannibales’, but fear not, this typographical chaos is typical of the Eurociné experience: *Mondo cannibal*, ‘Mondo Cannibale’ and ‘Mondo Cannibales’ are one and the same release! What’s harder to fathom is why the company promoted the picture again, around October 1981, as *La déesse des barbares*. As of this writing, no film print bearing the title *La déesse des barbares* has surfaced on video, DVD or Blu-ray, so the only evidence that this version ever existed is the CNC visa registration entry dated 20 October 1981, and a dramatic poster which puts busty Sabrina Siani centre-stage. Given that the poster appends the words ‘Mondo Cannibal’ in small letters at the bottom, it seems likely that *La déesse des barbares* was a regional French retitling of *Mondo Cannibal*, in which case it’s possible that no version exists bearing this third title onscreen. Small town cinemagoers attracted by the striking poster art may have found, as the house lights dimmed, that the film as it appeared onscreen was in fact called *Mondo Cannibal*. Was the word ‘cannibal’ perhaps unwelcome in certain regions of France, perhaps with advertising restricted and front-of-house displays discouraged thanks to the scandal surrounding the repulsive *Cannibal Holocaust*?

With a sequence thus established, let’s take a closer look at the credits. The first puzzle is the visa classification number. Although the film is registered with the Centre national du cinéma



TOP ROW: Eurociné's original press-sheet for Les Cannibales; Eurociné's third press-sheet, as La déesse des barbares; mystery ad-sheet for The Cannibals using artwork from Devil Hunter! BOTTOM ROW: Eurociné's second release of the film, Mondo Cannibale; promo art for Devil Hunter as The Man Hunter – note similarity to the poster above it.

(CNC) under the visa number 52347, the onscreen credits for *Les Cannibales* give the visa number as 52437, reversing the '3' and '4'. The onscreen credits of *Mondo Cannibal*, meanwhile, agree with the CNC records. Given the close similarity of the two numbers, it seems likely that an error was made on the first release and corrected on the second. Interestingly, the erroneous visa number '52437' was subsequently left 'fallow' in the CNC's records (whereas the surrounding numbers 52436 and 52438 were used by other French films). This suggests that the CNC knew that *Les Cannibales* had been released with the wrong number. Did Eurociné inform them of the mistake? In which case, someone at the CNC may have put a 'block' on '52437' to avoid future duplication. The fact that the correct number is used on the screen credits for *Mondo Cannibal*, and then logged at the CNC as the visa number for *La déesse des barbares*, suggests that these two 'versions' are one and the same; in other words they are regional titling variations stemming from the same basic film print. And while I've not been able to scour all the newspaper archives of France, I did spend a week in Paris, studying records at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Cinémathèque Française: the earliest French screening I can confirm for the film, under any title, is 21 October 1981, just a day after the CNC's recorded visa date. The name under which the film played, according to the French trade magazine *Le Film Français*, was 'Mondo Cannibale' (i.e. *Mondo Cannibal*).

Another intriguing issue is the co-production credit for Magna Films among the screen credits for *Les Cannibales*. In terms of hands-on production, Eurociné were clearly the prime movers on this film: they are named three times onscreen, and their regular cast and crewmembers are all over it. The credits begin by naming Eurociné as 'presenters' and copyright holders, but a later caption says that the film is a co-production between Eurociné and Magna Films. (The CNC's printed archive states that the film was a 50%-French 50%-Spanish co-production between Magna Films and Eurociné.) Magna Films were a post-production house based in Madrid, so why did they end up with a production credit? Perhaps Franco edited the film there, and Magna granted him unusually generous terms in return for some sort of later kickback? Note that Magna were also producers of Franco's unreleased *El escarabajo de oro*, made immediately before *The Cannibals*. The producer of that film was Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo, head of Tritón Films, so it seems that he was also the man behind Magna Films.

Although the later *Mondo Cannibal* version omits any mention of Magna (and skips all the technical credits except for Jess Franco's directorial tag), a full page advert for *Mondo Cannibal* in *Le Film Français* dated 13 November 1981 added the following information: "Hermes Films et Eurociné présentent un film de Jess Franco." Hermes Films were a Spanish company which again had links to Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo, so one way or another it seems that this man was involved in co-financing *The Cannibals*. Given that his company Tritón had already worked with Franco

and Eurociné, co-producing *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (1979) and *Las chicas de Copacabana* (1979), it appears that *El escarabajo de oro* and *The Cannibals*, both of which were filmed partly in Elche, stemmed from that same association.

Moving on to international releases, the Italian version, *La dea cannibale*, not only gives the Spanish outfit Titanic Films as production company, but also attributes directing duties to Franco Prosperi in the opening credits, and Julio Perez Tabernero in the closing credits! What appears to have happened here is that Tabernero (a somewhat shady figure in Spanish cinema, with numerous failed or compromised projects behind him) was planning to release *The Cannibals* in Spain: hence his and Prosperi's possessory credits, designed to grab two lots of tax incentives and/or film subsidies by passing off the film as an Italian-Spanish co-production. For some reason, though, the film never came out in Spain, so the Italian release in October 1984 was all that remained of the arrangement. All of which would make a modicum of sense except that the lavish Italian poster for *La dea cannibale* ignores all this and gives proper credit to Jess Franco! Did Franco Prosperi catch wind of the Italian release and threaten a lawsuit, leading to a reissue with Jess Franco properly credited? If so, this could explain a curious anomaly in the Italian release: namely the existence of a different Italian poster billing the film under an oddly non-Italian title *Cannibals*. The stunning artwork is a dramatic illustration of rampaging natives brandishing human thighbones and gnawing human flesh, and listed in the credits beneath are cast-members Al Cliver, Sabrina Siani, Jérôme Foulon, 'Candy Coster' (aka Lina Romay) and 'Jal Mayans' (aka Antonio Mayans), making it clear that this is indeed the Franco film. The director, however, is given as Franco Prosperi, and the companies behind this release are named as Sirius International Films and Filman. Sirius were a small production company responsible for a handful of sleazy and/or oddball films in the late 1970s including the obscure 1979 rape-revenge *Midnight Blue*, while Filman were a fairly well established distribution company who were also mentioned in the early trade announcements for "The Cannibal" when Franco Prosperi was still attached to that project. Confused yet?

Finally, a curious French advertising artwork for *Les Cannibales* has turned up online, which credits Sabrina Siani, Jérôme Foulon and Olivier Mathot beneath artwork taken from the German release of *Devil Hunter*! Across the top is the adline from a May 1980 *Variety* advert for *Devil Hunter*: "Invisible! Terrifying! Inhuman! A shocking picture of terror and suspense!" This mind-bending fusion of two different films looks to me like pre-release artwork hastily slapped together, with the text roughly cut out from a sheet of paper and glued on to the picture. I've been unable to trace the provenance of this assembly (Eurociné's Daniel Lesoeur didn't recognise it when I showed it to him), but I suspect it was knocked up quickly before Cannes, by someone at Eurociné. Perhaps there simply wasn't time to commission the proper artwork? Either that, or a mystery prankster has taken it upon himself to cloud an already confusing picture even further!

EL SEXO ESTÁ LOCO

(Spanish theatrical title) *Sex Is Crazy*

Spain, 1980

depósito legal no: M-10.687-1981

Alternative title

The Sex is Crazy (US DVD cover)

Sexo loco (shooting title reported in *Hoja del Lunes*)

Production company

Tritón P.C. (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Star Films S.A. (Spain) (SMC erroneously lists Spanish Warner)

Timeline

Shooting date:	March	1980
Seville	12 December	1981
Madrid	15 March	1982
Murcia	01 April	1982
Barcelona	19 April	1982

Theatrical running time

Spain 91m

DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Manga Video' PAL DVD 85m44s

"Dos parejas estan tan enamoradas que les lleva al primer cuatrimonio de la historia." ["Two couples are so in love, which leads them to the first 'quadrilateral marriage' in history."]

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. executive producer: **Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. *Spanish pressbook adds*: [2nd] camera operator: **Luis Durá Colombo** [as 'L.F. Doracolombo'].

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Marcia/Ms. Fonseca/Cookie). **Lynn Endersson** [as 'Lynn Anderson'] (Dorothy/Eusavia Castel/Ms. Bernarda). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Spencer/Gutierrez). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (Flanagan/Martinez). **Jess Franco** (the director). **Laura García** (Rosalinda, producer's girlfriend/female 'Argentinian'). **Antonio Martín** (Panchito the 'Argentinian'). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Soler'] (Registry Office official/stills photographer). **José Luis Martínez** (Juanito). **Gloria Menéndez** (Juanito's girlfriend).

Synopsis: *A race of aliens abduct human women to serve as baby factories. From insemination to birth takes just nine seconds. Or so it seems, until we cut away to an audience of masked figures watching the action in a small nightclub: the 'aliens' take a bow and the audience applaud [SHIFT] Two couples (their real names unknown to us) are in Benidorm making a movie. They play two couples – Dorothy and Spencer, Flanagan and Marcia – nightclub performers whose shows involve simulated sex with multiple partners. They rehearse a scene in which Marcia is jealous because Flanagan got aroused while performing with Dorothy. The director of the film, plainly visible in a bathroom mirror, calls a halt and asks for another take. [The camera shooting the scene is the one being held by the director: he continues to shoot despite his reflection remaining visible.] After chatting with Marcia in her hotel room, Flanagan drugs her wine: "This will put her to sleep for a few hours!" he laughs, directly to camera. [It seems that the film-within-a-film is itself a deconstructed thriller, with glimpses of the crew and breaking of the fourth wall.] Flanagan slips away, believing Marcia is unconscious, but she's faking. She follows him to a pleasure boat docked at a quayside. Inside she finds Flanagan playing cards with Dorothy, Spencer, and the director. She confronts them, accusing Flanagan of infidelity: totally unfazed, they tell her she's deluded. When Marcia threatens to shoot herself, the director orders a nude man and woman ('the Argentinians') to overpower her. They tie her to a chair. Spencer demands to know the whereabouts of stolen plans for an 'overground submarine'. [Marcia and Spencer slip out of character and look at the camera: a voice from out of shot says, "That's good" and tells them to continue.] Spencer makes a few more threats but, in a whisper, he and Marcia arrange to meet later. The 'Argentinians' menace Marcia with a knife and fork. After a minute or two, Flanagan can watch no more 'torture' and intervenes to save Marcia, whom he says can be trusted. [A woman called Nina steps forward and refreshes the actress's make-up.] Flanagan claims that Marcia has hidden the plans in her vagina, at his insistence: he removes a capsule from her vagina which he says contains the plans. Having seen that Marcia can resist torture, the others are willing to trust her. Flanagan and Marcia drive back to their hotel, having sex in the front seat. [SHIFT] Marcia wakes up in a hotel bed. Lying next to her is Spencer. She walks down to the sea. Spencer joins her and they have sex. From a hotel verandah, Flanagan and Dorothy [who refers to Flanagan as 'Martinez'] become aroused while spying on Spencer and Marcia with a telescope. They in turn are observed from a nearby balcony by a young man called Juanito and his girlfriend, who also start screwing. In the next hotel room, 'The Argentinians' (Rosalinda and Panchito) hear the action through the wall and they start making love too. [A voice-over introduces Rosalinda as 'the producer's girlfriend'.] 'Martinez' and Dorothy walk past an open hotel room doorway and see Spencer and Marcia making out. "The ones from before!" says Martinez. The couples get acquainted. Dorothy says that Marcia is someone she has seen in a dream, but Marcia protests to camera that this was her line: she demands confirmation from the director, who steps into shot and tells Dorothy that the line was indeed Marcia's. The actors continue the scene, with the line in question spoken by Marcia. While in character, Marcia calls Spencer 'Gutierrez'. After group sex, the couples go to a registry office and get married: as a foursome. The registrar names them as 'Mr.*

EL SEXO ESTÁ LOCO

CON
CANDY COSTER - LYNN ANDERSEN
ROBERT FOSTER - TONY SKIOS
DIRECTOR: JESS FRANCO

(Autorizada para mayores de 18 años)
CLASIFICADA (S)



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Martinez' [previously Flanagan], 'Mr. Gutierrez' [previously Spencer], 'Ms. Castel' [previously Dorothy] and 'Ms. Fonseca' [previously Marcia]. The two men are almost immediately bored with 'duogamy'. A passing girl (Juanito's girlfriend seen earlier) catches their attention and they chase after her, much to the distress of 'Fonseca'. She informs her 'co-wife' and the two women decide to sleep with other men: clearly visible in a mirror, the director and a stills photographer film their conversation. The camera zooms in on its own reflection. [SHIFT] The four leads are now different characters who have been watching on video what we have seen so far. 'Ms. Castel' is now called Mrs. Bernarda; 'Gutierrez' is now Mr. Bernarda; 'Fonseca' is now Cookie; 'Martinez' is now Flanagan (again). Cookie is a hooker: common, vulgar and playful. The others regard her with secret malevolence. Mr. Bernarda and Flanagan are members of a macho cult that despises women. They smother Cookie and take her to an abandoned nightclub where she becomes a sacrificial victim for 'The Temple of Cucufate', a cult which comprises all the actors seen so far. Masked figures peer at Cookie from the darkness. A dancer in a Lucifer mask menaces her, and Mrs. Bernarda stabs her with a dagger. The dancer removes his mask to reveal – blackness [SHIFT] Marcia (?) wakes up in bed: she drinks water and masturbates. Cut to a journey by car: Marcia in the passenger seat, Spencer driving. Spencer picks up a hitch-hiker: it's Rosalinda. They trade secret glances. With Marcia fast asleep, they agree to stop for sex in the bushes. Unbeknownst to them, they are being observed by two aliens. We cut to Rosalinda crying in her hotel room: a voice-over says that she is now the producer's ex-girlfriend, on account of her refusal to do the sex scene in the bushes. Marcia wakes up and looks for Spencer. She's captured by the aliens and taken to their flying saucer. As impregnation begins we see a group of masked characters, watching. The film's end titles appear, and the masked figures applaud...

Production notes: For some Franco critics, the 1980s are all about decline. Commentators like Carlos Aguilar, for instance, find almost nothing of worth in his output during these years. But while it's true that some of Franco's most dispiriting and insignificant work comes from the 1980s, the same period boasts a great many outstanding and at times astonishing films, including a dozen or so that stand up alongside his best work of the 1970s. *El sexo está loco* is one such film and there are plenty more to choose from, because Franco's filmography went through an incredible growth spurt during the eighties, expanding from ninety at the end of the 1970s to a staggering one hundred and forty by 1985, over half as much again in just five years! Such a phenomenal work rate seems unreal, but as we consider the brutal corporate pressures at work in the 1980s, such extreme productivity begins to look like a race against time, against the elements, against the various trials and adversities that would, by the end of the decade, more or less finish off the independent sector of commercial European cinema.

In early 1980 Franco made a deal for two films with Spanish production house Tritón: a sweet softcore fantasy, *El lago de las vírgenes*, and an almost indescribable sci-fi parody called *El sexo está loco*, one of the most off-the-wall films to come out of Spain in the 1980s. Director of photography Juan Soler has very fond memories

of making the movie: "El sexo está loco is as nutty as a fruitcake, and full of very amusing details. There is a mockery of the dubbing of American films into Spanish. Jesús allowed himself to do absolutely what he wanted, without the control of any producer, and shoots everything that comes to mind, letting the crew appear in the mirror, letting me enter the frame to get my camera. As always, we worked with very few resources of light and the 'sets' are the hotel rooms where we stayed, or nightclubs, where we had enough lights. I had a lot of fun with that scene where Mayans and Skios, naked and painted silver, go to kidnap Lina from the car. They walk with so much care that it's not clear whether it's to make no noise and surprise her, or because they are barefoot and they are being stabbed in their feet by the pebbles!"¹

Madrid-based production outfit Tritón were actually among the more stable financiers of Franco's work during his turbulent passage from French to Spanish production in the late 1970s. Franco's chief ally there was Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo, who was executive producer on *Las chicas de Copacabana* (1979), *Sinfonía erótica* (1979), *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (1980) and *El sexo está loco* (1980), production manager on *Ópalo de fuego* (*Mercaderes del sexo*) (1978), *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* (1980) and *Devil Hunter* (1980), and producer of *El lago de las vírgenes* (1981). (Note that two of these were actually J.E. Films productions, suggesting that Julián Esteban's company had business links with Tritón).

"Jess Frank – my friend the director Jess Franco for his Spanish films, which have made me enjoy jazz – is shooting 'Sexo loco'. When we least expect it, Jesus will give us an authentic movie, full of art. How long it is, since your movie *Tenemos 18 años!*" – Ramon Pujante, *Hoja del Lunes*, 10 March 1980.

"Any similarities between the events and characters of this film and real life are purely coincidental. Furthermore, we would be left puzzled, because real life is not as crazy or stimulating. The authors have simply aimed to reflect, without pretention, the world of erotic dreams, the horny imaginations of two couples thrown into a film shoot that borders on pornography." – Opening credits of *El sexo está loco*.

Review: In 1980, Jean-Luc Godard returned to narrative filmmaking after several years producing Marxist essays on video. The film that announced his 'comeback' was *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (or *Slow Motion* in the UK), starring Isabelle Huppert and Jacques Dutronc. Although 'commercial' by Godard's then-recent standards, it was still pretty wild, with the sort of structural ellipses and discontinuities that would relegate it to the tiniest of art-houses today. At times the movie freezes at seemingly random intervals, and then advances frame by frame; dialogue from one scene is stuck over another; the audio from one scene continues to run over the next. So guess who must have seen this film on its release in Spain in 1980 and left the theatre feeling invigorated and inspired? Franco was a long-time admirer of Godard, whom he often declared was his favourite filmmaker. And *El sexo está loco* is by a long way the most Godardian, certainly the *oddest* Franco

film of the 1980s. Perhaps the only thing that seems discordant in comparison to Godard's approach is...

No, no, no... Start again... In 1974 Luis Buñuel directed *The Phantom of Liberty*, a surrealistic farce with a non-linear plot structure in which various unrelated episodes are linked together solely by the movement of certain characters from one scenario to... Oh what's the point? Franco is making a weirdo sex film with lots of alienation effects, and like one of Pavlov's dogs I'm salivating, automatically reaching for 'art movie' comparisons. What does a comparison prove except to move the terms across the board from one side of the newspaper to the other, in six languages at least? Does it matter if the cucufate is conical or digressive? In what sense does any of this really feed the birds? If a critic wants to use a film to empty the shells from the pigsty and cut holes in a twelve foot sheet of plastic then you can easily push through any face you like. All that matters is the conservation of mass times energy and momentum which leaves the opposite edges in uproar. Can a parody also line the casket with clandestine velvet and let the supple strength of the ages bend its breeches? We wonder...

In *El sexo está loco*, performance registers are unstable and unreliable. Scenes tilt over into play-acting or inappropriate levity without warning. What begins as a sexy science fiction comedy ("Penises set to launch!") turns into a paranoid crime drama, then swerves off into horror, back to comedy, into deconstructed porno... This proves to be the way throughout the film. We oscillate unpredictably between alternative versions of events, whilst the style in which these events are conveyed shifts too. Among the numerous oddities and illogicalities:

1. Franco himself appears onscreen as a film director shooting a scene with Romay and Tony Skios. He asks them for a second take of the same dialogue but in a more cheerful register.
2. A make-up girl steps into shot to dab at Romay's face, before being ordered away by the director.
3. Actors slip out of character and look at the camera, only for a directorial voice off camera to congratulate them and insist that they continue the scene.
4. A character is introduced to us in voice-over as the producer's girlfriend. Later we see her in tears, and we're informed that she has been sacked because she refused to perform a sex scene required by the script.
5. Doubling occurs throughout: actors play two roles, scenes are played twice, two happy couples going to a registry office to get married, that's to say, the couples wish to marry each other, two times two, making a marriage of four people; a jaunty music cue from *Eugénie, historia de una perversion* is played at double speed.
6. A sex scene in the driving seat of a car is rendered utterly alien and absurd, firstly by the dialogue, spoken in a sort of pidgin English with bizarre high pitched accents, and secondly by the fact that the car is travelling about five miles per hour as

it drives down a Benidorm seafront at dawn.

7. Characters swap their partners without warning, say each other's lines, then have to consult with the director to find out who should have said what. They subsequently re-take the scene but play it completely differently, with different dialogue. Names change constantly.
8. The audience at a live sex show wear synthetic joke store masks; later, these same mask-wearing individuals attack Lina Romay in the guise of monsters belonging to some sort of devil-worshipping sect intent upon sacrificing her. Do the masks conceal true monstrosity behind simulation? Or are these the faces of true monsters from outer space that just happen to look like rubberised ghouls?
9. As Mayans drives Romay to the countryside he spouts total gibberish, a mixture of film references (Mel Brooks; Hitchcock) and news snippets, an almost Burroughsian jumble of deregulated signifiers. The film is cut together as if the dialogue makes sense, with no stylistic cuteness revealing that it's a wind-up. It's as if the world has finally gone crazy, and conversations in random porno films have become divorced from even the most basic reality. Franco is satirising his own work here, knowing that the garbled jabbering that intercedes between sex scenes might as well be Martian for all that some sections of the audience care.
10. Franco himself intrudes frequently into shot: we see him reflected in mirrors while sitting behind his camera; entering the frame to give instruction; playing a character within the narrative; and at last, in an 'ouroboros' moment that seems to swallow the tail of his (bad) reputation, filming himself in a mirror by means of an out-of-focus zoom!

Frivolous experimentalism? Yes, in a sense, but it's also possibly the strangest game ever played in the context of commercial sex cinema, and taken in relation to its context and likely audience (the film played for years in the porno cinemas of Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia) it constitutes a radicalism of sorts. And for all the fun and games one senses an element of sardonic ennui lurking beneath. For instance, in the search for new ways of showing sex, Franco creates one especially bizarre conjoinment involving Lina Romay and Tony Skios, the two of them kissing passionately while another man's legs scissor awkwardly around their necks. It's the sort of shot a director would snip out of an orgy scene because the audience would probably burst out laughing. Arousal and copulation are satirised, and so is violence. Torture, ever the spice in Franco's sexy arsenal, makes an appearance, but here it's in the form of Romay, tied to a chair, being poked by a nude couple wielding a canteen knife and fork. The detective films Franco loves so much are also parodied, as Skios pulls a roll of microfilm out of Romay's snatch, declaring it to be plans for a new kind of submarine. It's described as "an overground submarine", a deliberately ludicrous detail that suggests the kind of absurdity one scribbles in a dream diary (not for the first time I find myself

wondering if Franco kept a dream diary, or at the very least wrote down his dreams on a notepad by the bed: it would explain a lot when it comes to his bizarre and elliptical plots and frequently hilarious non-sequitur dialogue).

Note too that the Devil is back, after a five-year absence; last seen sticking it to Susan Hemingway in *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, here he's a nude dancer wearing a dime-store devil mask, who prances around doing high kicks before pulling off his mask to reveal... Nothing. A black screen. I'm not sure but I *think* this might be a statement...

All of which brings us to the idea of sexual 'alienation'. And yes, in a film about sexual aliens the implied pun is surely intentional. Alienation is expressed through the rote repetition of dialogue, the reduction of speech to chanting or nonsense, and the verbatim repetition of actions and scenarios. The aliens' reproductive processes takes nine seconds from penetration to birth of a baby, removing any semblance of desire. Blank-faced robotic humanoids fuck as if on some ritualised production line. "*They don't do it too bad, for aliens,*" says one of the onlookers, all of whom are wearing joke-store rubber fright masks: "*It's too bad that they look so weird.*" Visually the film inhabits that familiar Franco world of anonymous hotel rooms and bland verandahs, lobbies and bars and tourist nowheres. The stand-out scene has a drunken Romy talking about the art of flirtation, while eye contact between the other three actors makes it clear that they're toying with her behind her back. There's something fantastically paranoid and disturbing about this scene, as Romy, the liveliest and least pretentious of actresses, plays the unwitting dupe in a room that, despite the view from the window over sunny Benidorm, has suddenly turned chilly. Quietly, as if to assuage her anxiety, Franco then films her fingering herself on a bed while drinking mineral water; the scene goes on and on to a Warholian degree, but its peaceful sense of reality amid malign surrounding artifice earns the space it occupies.

El sexo está loco certainly lives up to its title. The film has a slippery, unstable quality, the product of a highly developed mind with a wayward, capricious wit. Dashed off as per usual, during another busy year, it's far from rigorous, but then who would ever expect rigour from Franco? It's simultaneously the artiest and the silliest of his films, and it plays equally well as a postmodernist deconstruction of his work or a party-hour send-up. A frivolous curio masquerading as jaundiced self-parody? Or is it the other way round? Franco's contrarian impatience with 'the art film game' would never allow him to opt for one without the other, and it suits the structural conceit of this film for the answer to be undecidable. In the end, this film exists because sex is crazy, art is crazy, and Jess Franco is crazy.

Franco on screen: Playing himself, Franco avoids all the potential pit-falls of posing or pretension. Cool, calm, collected; no showboating, no screeching at the cast, no mugging to camera. Oh, and he wears a nice leather jacket; it makes a change to see him looking so smart.

Music: Among music cues from recent films such as *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, *Eugénie, historia de una perversion*, *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties* and *Las chicas de Copacabana* (the latter a lovely version of the main theme played on electronically treated violin and acoustic guitar), we're treated to long passages of improvised keyboard, drawn from the same sessions that yielded the score for *Aberraciones*. Some of this material also turned up later in the equally delirious and hallucinatory *Macumba Sexual*.

Locations: The most astounding location is the 'flying saucer' seen at the end of the film; it's actually a nightclub, still open today, on the outskirts of Benidorm (visit www.kubenidorm.es for details). The majority of the hotel-based shooting took place at the Hotel Cervantes on Calle Lepanto in Benidorm ... A poster on a wall advertises the Alicante bullring known as La Plaza de Paquito Esplá.

Connections: The last time Franco played so deliberately with the technical conceits of cinema was in *Necronomicon*, but even there he didn't go so far as to deconstruct the film itself ... One is also reminded of Franco's first film, *Tenemos 18 años*, in which the narrators, two teenage girls, prove inherently capricious and unreliable, recasting events in their lives to fit their whims and their fluctuating opinion of the other participants ... Approximately forty-five minutes into the film, Lina Romy cries while looking in a mirror whose reflection reveals Franco filming the scene, his eye pressed to the camera. Juan Soler hovers beside him holding a light meter. This is as clear an indication as we're ever likely to see of how the films of this period were actually shot ... The rubber fright masks worn by the audience at the sex show (and later by the adherents of the Temple of Cucufate) recall the masks at the sex party which ended in unwitting incest in 1978's *Cocktail spécial* ... *El sexo está loco* is the first Franco film to acknowledge the existence of videotape, the format that would see the end of Franco's cinema, its rebirth as home entertainment, and the beginning of his cult reputation. The dialogue here takes on a multi-layered quality, prophetic even, as the 'quadrilateral' married couples stare at a TV screen on which a video has just ended, leaving rolling bars of static. "*Wow, it's finished!*" says Romy over a shot of video fuzz. She may as well be talking about cinema. Here begins the end. "*That was short, eh?*" "*Of course,*" says Skios, "*Everything good lasts a short while.*" Videotape was the new frontier of early 1980s entertainment and Franco's films were among the first to appear in the new medium. A feature about the phenomenon in *Le Film Français* dated 15 January 1982 listed a number of titles currently available: among them were Franco's *Les Possédées du diable* (aka *Lorna... the Exorcist*), *Le Sadique de Notre-Dame*, and *Une vierge chez les morts-vivants* (*A Virgin Among the Living Dead*), plus Jean Rollin's *Le lac des morts-vivants* (aka *Zombie Lake*). A month later, on 19 February 1982, two more Franco films were included in a follow-up article for the same magazine: *Un capitain de quinze ans* (*The Fifteen Year-Old Captain*) and *Les Demons* ... The planet Argolis was probably named after a region of Greece situated in the eastern part of the Peloponnese peninsula.

ABERRACIONES SEXUALES DE UNA MUJER CASADA

(Spanish theatrical title)

Sexual Aberrations of a Married Woman

Spain, 1980

Spanish depósito legal no: M-40.284-1980

French visa no: 56096

Alternative titles

Emmanuelle Rubia (SP registration title) *Blonde Emmanuelle*

Cecilia (FR theatrical re-edit by Eurociné)

Cécilia fille de feu (FR visa submission) *Cecilia, Girl of Fire*

La Proie du Désir (Cecilia) (FR video) *Victim of Desire (Cecilia)*

Cecilia Hemmungslos und Unersättlich (GER DVD)

Cecilia Unrestrained and Insatiable

The Red Hot Cecilia (Eurociné pressbook title)

for Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada:

Production company

J.E. Films (Spain)

Theatrical distributor

Sonora Films [Roberto Clemente, Moreno Perez] (Spain)

for Cecilia:

Production company

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Eurociné (Paris)

Timeline

<i>Aberraciones</i> shooting	Early Spring	1980
Depósito legal no. (<i>Emmanuelle rubia</i>)	22 November	1980
Barcelona	12 March	1981
Seville	25 April	1981
Madrid	26 May	1981
Murcia	22 May	1982
<i>Cecilia</i> additional shooting	summer	1982
French visa issued (<i>Cecilia fille de feu</i>)	02 May	1983
France	18 May	1983

Theatrical running times

Spain	98m
France (as <i>Cecilia</i>)	98m

Video/DVD running times (converted where necessary)

SP 'Major Video' PAL VHS version (<i>Aberraciones sexuales</i>)	88m33s
US 'Blue Underground' NTSC DVD (<i>Cecilia</i>)	104m50s

writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. producer: **Julián Esteban**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Luis Durá [Colombo]**, **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Joaquín Domínguez**. production assistants: **Draguy Steiner** [as 'Draky Steiner'], Juan Almirall.* art director: **Antonio de Cabo**. make-up: **Guillermina Guerrero**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Maria Almirall']. editor: **Nicole Guettard**. music: **Jesús Franco** [uncredited] & **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. music recording: **[Estudios] Eurosonic**. sound re-recording: **Magna Films, S.A.**. laboratory: **Madrid Film, S.A.**. titles: **Story Film – Pablo Muñoz**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Muriel Montossé** [as 'Victoria Adams'] (*Emmanuelle*/Emma Fargas). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Andreas Fargas**). **Lina Romay** (George's mother). **Antonio de Cabo** (The Marquis, 'Uncle' Antonin). **José Valero** (Khan). **Antonio Vasco** (George). **Ana Paula** (Antonin's girlfriend). *Cecilia* adds: **Olivier Mathot** (party host). **Pierre Taylou** (man at party). **France Lomay** [as 'France Jordan'] (party guest). **Christian Dragaux**. **Richard Darbois**. *Eurociné pressbook* adds: **Robert Merckx** [sic].

* 'Juan Almirall' (aka Joan Almirall, Lina Romay's brother) is credited here as a production assistant. However, Antonio Mayans has stated to me that Joan Almirall never worked on any of Franco's films. His name was often used as a pseudonym by Franco himself, usually for camera credits, but in all other cases his name was being used to make up the requisite number of Spanish credits for co-production financing purposes.

** Andreas and Emma's marital surname is never spoken in the Spanish dub, but in the Spanish pressbook it is given as 'Fangas'. This however seems likely to have been a misprint: the name 'Fargas' is a common Spanish surname but there is no such surname as 'Fangas'.

Synopsis: *Emmanuelle is the bored, sexually frustrated wife of a wealthy but emotionally reserved husband, Andreas. After she exposes her nude body to Khan, her chauffeur, while being driven home in her limousine, he drives her to a nearby shack where his brother and cousin live. The two men climb into the back seat and rape her while Khan watches. Though at first shocked and horrified, she soon begins to enjoy the rough, invasive sex. After bathing with the three men at a nearby lake, she drives home alone. The following day she tells Andreas of the attack and reveals that she enjoyed it. The couple decide to embark on an open relationship, but their plan is soon plagued by jealousy and hypocrisy on both sides. Falling in love with Khan, Emmanuelle considers leaving her increasingly callous and promiscuous husband, but Khan decides to move on and signs up as a merchant seaman. Distraught, Emmanuelle drowns her sorrows at a local bar where she drunkenly cavorts semi-nude. A furious Andreas insists on taking her home. However, on a*

stretch of road beside the sea Emmanuelle gets out of the car to gaze longingly at Khan's departing ship. Appalled by her emotional infidelity, Andreas drives off, leaving her to walk home through the woods. Four men from the bar capture and gang-rape her, but this time her husband is unsympathetic. The couple almost split, but instead decide to abandon their experimentation with multiple partners.

Review: Stylistically and atmospherically, *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* belongs in the upper reaches of the Franco pantheon, boasting numerous magical and hallucinatory sequences lovingly photographed in his best elliptical manner. Choice of location is always vitally important to Franco, and he excels himself here, setting this story of love, rape and jealousy in the house and grounds of the gorgeous Palacio de Monserrate in Sintra, Portugal. A haven of luxurious flower-scented mystery, it's the ideal setting for a film of dreamy, spaced-out languor.

The characters, on the other hand, are deliberately less than adorable, and some of the plot developments are anything but. This is the story of Emmanuelle, a wealthy diplomat's wife, whom we first see reclining in the back seat of a limousine, flaunting her body to her chauffeur, Khan, out of sheer petulant boredom. She's played as shallow, self-absorbed, childish and vain. Khan is no angel either: irritated by Emmanuelle's teasing, he parks by the roadside and allows his two brothers to rape her. Back home, in one of those gob-smacking developments so common in the Franco universe, Emmanuelle blithely informs her husband, Andreas, that she actually enjoyed the experience. *"I didn't tell you all this so you'd turn the whole thing into a tragedy. I don't want you to think in terms of killing, punishing, revenge."* Though he's understandably nonplussed when his wife declares that she now wants sex with other men, having been driven to new heights of passion by sexual assault, Andreas too is difficult to admire. He comes across in subsequent scenes as petty and emotionally withdrawn, prone to cynicism and bitterness. As he and his wife begin to explore their newly minted open relationship, his attitude is marred by a constant streak of reproach. She, in turn, is hypocritically jealous of his sexual escapades with other women. There, dear viewer, are your three charming protagonists, so if you feel you really have to *like* movie characters this film may not be for you!

What Franco appears to be aiming for is an amoral tale about moral choices, a formula almost Buñuelian in its irony. It's a tough pill to swallow, however, thanks to the film's dauntingly casual attitude to rape. The story hinges on two sexual assaults, both of which happen to Emmanuelle. In the first, she's attacked by her chauffeur's relatives: in the second she's assaulted by a gang of four men after drunkenly performing an impromptu strip at a local bar. The first attack 'opens her up to new experiences' as she discovers the sexual excitement she cannot find in her marriage; the second sends her back to the arms of her husband. We are therefore being asked in the first instance to believe that rape can be therapeutic, and in the second to look upon it as a sort of life lesson for the victim. What artistic justification or defence can possibly be

mounted for such apparently obnoxious notions? Before I attempt to put these transgressions in context of Franco's overall approach to erotic cinema, we should first unpack the disturbing details of the scenes in question.

Let's begin with the rape that opens the film. Emmanuelle, who has been sailing on her private yacht, comes ashore to find her limousine waiting at the quayside. She climbs in the back seat and lounges there coquettishly before removing her only item of clothing, a flimsy one-piece dress. Teasingly she asks Khan, the chauffeur, if he's enjoying looking at her. *"Don't you like me any more?"* she asks, as he watches her through the rear-view mirror. *"Would it make any difference?"* he replies. Clearly there's a history of sexual tension between these two, with the woman flaunting herself while exploiting her status as employer to keep a lid on the situation. Tracing her fingers over her breasts and nipples, she makes eye contact with Khan through the rear-view mirror, until she realises he's no longer driving her home. When she challenges him, he replies, *"It's the way to mine and my brothers' house [...] three little troublemakers the boss fired because they were peeping, watching you undress. But you were deliberately provoking them... as you're provoking me!"* When Emmanuelle demands that he stop the car, Khan replies, *"I'm not taking orders any more. I just quit this very minute!"* As the car pulls up, two men standing by the bushes climb in the back seat and sexually assault Emmanuelle. (We assume they are the brothers to whom Khan referred, although they don't speak.) After the assault has gone on for a while, the woman's screams turn into moans of pleasure and gradually she becomes a willing participant, caressing the men's heads as they grope and manhandle her. Afterwards they go for a swim together in a small lake strewn with waterlilies. Looking calm and happy, Emmanuelle swims alone for a while before returning to her car and driving back to her house...

To be clear, the 'rape' itself is ambiguously presented: we never see penetration (the film is softcore) and the assailants never take off their trousers. There's no actual thrusting involved, so if we're being absolutely meticulous with regard to what we see, it seems that this is not technically a rape, more a sexual assault (lots of groping and forced kissing). You could argue that the scene is intended to depict rape, with censorship restraining the graphic details, but this argument doesn't quite hold up: the film's 'S' certificate would allow for a rape scene far more convincing than this. Nevertheless, what we do see is a female character being attacked and sexually molested by two men, before being aroused to the point where she accepts their violent attentions and reaches orgasm (as mentioned in her dialogue later). Arriving home still nude, she exits the car and her husband Andreas runs to greet her. *"What happened to you my love?"* he gasps, *"I was very worried."* She doesn't answer but clings to him silently. Andreas carries her to the bedroom, and in a development which shows how little sense of reality this film has, he takes off his trousers and starts screwing her. Who in his right mind would react in such a way, when it's clear from her nudity and silence that something distressing has occurred? Developments

MAIN PICTURE: Emmanuelle voluntarily submits
the men who sexually assaulted her earlier

BELOW: Emmanuelle with her husband Andre
(Antonio Mayans); just not nasty enough



ADERRACIONES SEXUALES
DE UNA MUJER CASADA

VICTORIA ADAMS ROBERT FOSTER
LINA HERNANDEZ A DE CADA
EN UNO DE LOS DOS
CLIFFORD BRUNN
HOLLYWOOD PICTURES PRESENTA
UN FILM DE



ADERRACIONES SEXUALES
DE UNA MUJER CASADA

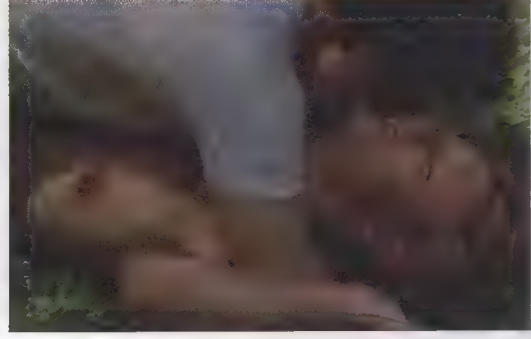
VICTORIA ADAMS ROBERT FOSTER
LINA HERNANDEZ A DE CADA
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UN FILM DE



LEFT, FROM TOP:
Khan (José Valero)
shares his blanket
with Emmanuelle.
Emmanuelle rides free.
The drug party scene.

MAIN PICTURE:
Emmanuelle, rich,
bored and available.

BOTTOM ROW L to R:
The first assault, in
Emmanuelle's car.
The second assault,
outdoors.



such as this make it abundantly clear that the film is situated not in the real world but in the humid imagination of a sexual obsessive ... The men to whom Emmanuelle has surrendered are sweaty, loutish and uncouth: this of course is tapping into the class-based fantasy of the rich spoiled beauty 'giving it up' to a gang of lower class beasts. Emmanuelle (whose name immediately takes her out of reality and into the domain of fantasy-erotica) is a classic porno stereotype – the rich bitch gagging for a bit of rough. The next day, having been filled in on the lurid details, Andreas sits with Emmanuelle on the terrace of their mansion (an edifice so grand you wonder exactly what Andreas does for a living. Is he Portugal's number one crime lord, or an exiled member of the Spanish royal family?) "*It's monstrous. My wife violated by two filthy pigs,*" he says. It's a line that reveals much of what's wrong in his marriage: instead of saying 'you were violated' he's angry that "*my wife [was] violated*", which underlines the notion of women as property. Emmanuelle doesn't help to soothe his ruffled sense of ownership though, much less any possible affection, when she adds, "*Those two boys made me come so much I went crazy. They managed to bring out in me an extraordinary sensuality. The animal in heat!*" And so it seems we must retroactively downgrade the assault from a heinous crime to a kind of 'tough love' cure for frigidity and boredom!

The second rape occurs when Emmanuelle and her husband visit a bar which stays open 'til dawn. Having drunk too much, Emmanuelle performs an impromptu strip while her embarrassed and furious husband looks on. She's so intoxicated she can barely stand, but keeps pulling away when Andreas tries to restrain her. Finally he slaps her and drags her outside. The whole scene has been observed by a group of men at the bar, who regard her with both lust and contempt. During the drive back home, Emmanuelle insists on getting out of the car, as it skirts the coastline, in order to gaze at the ship on which Khan is sailing away to a new life as a merchant seaman. Unable to take this rejection and humiliation, Andreas drives off, leaving Emmanuelle to walk home alone. Unfortunately for her, the next car to drive down this quiet country road contains the men who were watching at the bar. They climb out, chase her through the countryside, and gang-rape her: this time Emmanuelle feels nothing but fear and horror...

Here, as before, rape is a male response to female exhibitionism: the attackers see her as a slut who's looking for trouble, a common self-justification among men who think that a woman who flaunts her attractiveness is 'asking for it'. Problematically, Franco does not challenge this 'cause and effect' formulation in the action or dialogue, nor does he deliver a comeuppance for the perpetrators. Instead he maintains a detached position. Justice for the victim is withheld: no one calls the authorities, so the rapists (whom we never see again) get off scot-free. In the case of the first assault this is Emmanuelle's wish: she enjoyed the experience and doesn't want her husband to call the police. Indeed, she later returns to Khan's brothers for more. In the second case, Emmanuelle doesn't enjoy the rape at all, but still neither she nor Andreas call the police. Andreas, still sore about his wife's lust for Khan, reacts

cynically and leaves on a business trip, remarking to a friend, "*She probably got off on it.*" What's striking is that reporting the crime is not even suggested, an omission which makes the film completely unbelievable as a depiction of real life. Emmanuelle and Andreas seem to accept what has happened as just the sad and painful consequence of a flirtatious night out, leaving the rapists free to attack other women. It's a weird, extraordinary scenario, presented with a flattened lack of affect. Also withheld is any characterisation of the perpetrators, who are no more than briefly sketched conveyors of a particularly brutal plot device. Except for their misogynous laughter during Emmanuelle's drunken strip routine, they remain completely opaque.

So does the film, and by extension the director, accept rape as a response to female 'provocation'? Well, the film doesn't proselytise this horrendous viewpoint, and neither did Franco. He does, however, sit on his hands here, as the rapists roam freely among the barely sketched fronds of his narrative. Rather than exploring, or even just acknowledging, the traumatic consequences of sexual assault, Franco depicts a highly exotic and rarefied 'exceptional case' scenario, in which maybe – just maybe – a woman might find rape exciting and liberating. He also flirts with the idea that in some cases the victim, through sexual provocation, brings rape upon herself. The second assault seems almost to punish her, first for making a careless display of herself, and secondly for rubbing her husband's face in her romantic yearning for Khan. Franco accepts the nastiness of his own scenario with all the listless amorality of a psychopath dropping piranha into a goldfish tank. In the shadowy realm of his erotic fantasies, which is what we're gazing into, nothing need be held up to the light to be checked against real world considerations. Does the progression from Emmanuelle's drunken strip to her brutal gang rape suggest that she's paying a price for her licentious behaviour? Franco's emotionless aesthetic daze and directorial languor almost succeed in waylaying such awkward questions, until one emerges blinking from the film's oneiric torpor and asks what the hell is going on. It's one thing for a film to be an amoral playground, but when character motivations are so unbelievable it's difficult to gauge the substance of that amorality as a philosophical stance.

Not to mince words, Franco leaves himself open to a charge of moral irresponsibility. The only defence one can summon is that the fantasy world of the film is so obviously unreal. The story is a reverie, a dream-narrative in which people do things that few of us would countenance in the real world. One could say that the story is akin to Arthur Schnitzler's 1926 novella *Traumnovelle* (filmed by Stanley Kubrick as *Eyes Wide Shut*) with its focus on a marriage tested by forbidden fantasy, and in that context (beyond good and evil) one can more readily accept the filmmaker musing on whether rape might, in very rare cases, lead to sexual liberation. But the question is a thorny one, and the film sends mixed messages. To understand why Franco is telling such a tale, in such a way, we must bear in mind his lack of interest in realism. For him, rape is just another hot-house bloom in his garden of perversion, another

decadent waterlily floating on the phantasmal lake of his cinema. His interest in psychological repercussions is often zero (his 1972 film *Le journal intime d'un nymphomane* is a rare exception). He seems to write (or rather direct, as there were rarely any genuine scripts) like a man under the soothing effects of sodium pentothal, gently and carelessly allowing the contents of his imagination to roam where they will. His cinema is abstract and affectless; brutal sex or cruelty float by the aperture of his consciousness as gently and implacably as the characters float across the screen. The trappings of the horror genre, the familiar tropes of crime drama, the venerable clichés of men's mag porn fantasy, are allowed to drift, like clumps of algae, through the miasmatic dream lagoon of his vision. Throughout the film, Franco employs visual devices that elicit a sensation of drifting, coming unmoored from reality. In the car scene, as Emmanuelle undresses in the back seat, he shoots the chauffeur's eyes watching in the rear view mirror, but just as important to this sequence is the defocused backdrop provided by the rain-soaked windscreen, bejewelled with soft-focus water droplets and coloured by the passing foliage a variety of greens and reds. The effect is reminiscent of similar scenes in Altman's *Images* and Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. The car steers round a series of bends in the country road and so the background slides sideways, this way and that, as Khan's dark eyes flicker back and forth from the road ahead to the erotic spectacle in the back seat. As the twinkling, haunting music by Franco and Daniel White plays mesmerically over the scene, we are being encouraged to let go of narrative considerations and enter a world of pure sensation.

The subject-matter of open relationships and how to negotiate them is ripe for exploration in erotic cinema. After all, what else does the world of pornography offer to couples except vicarious infidelity – the sleeping around of the imagination? It's an ideal place in which to explore the real world counterpart. Franco's treatment of the topic here is very much weighted towards the negative, but the fact that the story apparently ends with the restoration of monogamy is by no means an endorsement of it; instead the suggestion is that monogamy is the refuge of the unimaginative and fearful. The failure of Emmanuelle and Andreas's experiment is due to their lies and jealousy; their return to monogamy requires them to ignore what they've learned about themselves and each other. In other words, marriage is precisely what the couple deserve – freedom is wasted on them. It's a pity there's no suggestion that the complexities of open relationships could be more successfully negotiated – failure is all that we see. The entire experiment is based on deep unhappiness, corrupting it from the start. Patching over a marital black hole with promiscuous sex was always doomed to failure. Emmanuelle's loneliness is the true driving force of her actions, and it's just as likely to haunt her at the end of the film. Despite agreeing to keep romance exclusive to the marriage, she gives in to her romantic yearnings for Khan, and if a rape facilitator like him can be a viable romantic competitor, Emmanuelle's love for her husband is clearly on its last legs! When at last the couple return to the marital fold, some might suppose they are turning

their backs on extra-marital sex. Personally I imagine they'll simply take the usual route of betraying each other in secret from now on. Neither can cope with freedom so they return to the prison of marriage, voluntarily, like institutionalised convicts yearning for the safety of their cells. The film's final shot of a vase of cut flowers, in contrast to the verdant subtropical splendour outdoors, adroitly symbolises their future together; the domestication of wild desire and the neutering of passion.

Cast and crew: Muriel Montossé, an actress with a pouty, doll-like face perfect for conveying spoilt, kittenish decadence, went on to work in French TV and became something of a minor celebrity. Playing her hapless husband is José Antonio Mayans Hervás (shortened to Antonio Mayans in most credits), a man who would become as important to Franco's cinema as his frequent female co-star Lina Romay. Mayans had first met Franco during the shoot for *Night of the Assassins*. After that film finished shooting, Franco drafted him in to shoot an extra scene, one that was clearly not part of the current scenario (see the entry for *La casa del ahorcado* in *Murderous Passions*) and Mayans was thus inducted into the director's world of multiple, sometimes clandestine shoots. He made contact with him again in 1979, being invited to join the cast of *El escarabajo de oro*, and from there on, in his capacity as leading man, production manager, location scout and organisational 'lieutenant', he became the rock supporting Franco's impulsive creativity ... Emmanuelle's Uncle Antonin is played by Antonio de Cabo, a Portuguese theatre director with whom Franco got on very well. When Emmanuelle says to Antonin, "*This thing with Khan was just plain crazy. It was... well, poetry, and poems are usually very short. Too short.*", he replies "*We are the ones who shorten poetry to our measure.*" This uncommonly fine dialogue stands out from the functional exchanges elsewhere in the film, leaving me to wonder whether De Cabo himself contributed it.

Music: A few basic jazz numbers aside, this is one of Franco's most spellbinding, oneiric scores, much of it played by the man himself on twinkling electric piano (Fender Rhodes) and shimmering string synthesiser (the ARP Solina). Lush, meandering, reflective, ruminant and occasionally ominous, the music drapes a mysterious dew-laden mist over the story and helps to displace the events we witness from the real world into dream space.

Locations: Of all the many Jess Franco films shot in the grounds of the Palacio de Monserrate in Sintra, Portugal (beginning with *Necronomicon* in 1967), *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* is the best showcase for the Palacio itself. It was built in 1858 for the wealthy British merchant and art collector Sir Francis Cooke, Visconde de Monserrate. Designed by James Knowles Jr in the Romantic-Orientalist style, the palace is a delirium of tall cylindrical towers, bulbous cupolas and decorative exotica incorporating numerous stylistic sources, including Moorish, Gothic and Italian. The roots of this promiscuity of influence can be found in English Romantic architecture, informed as it was by the newly acquired tastes of wealthy travellers at the height of the British Empire, returning from colonies in the East with fantastical design requests

quite at odds with the sobriety at home. (A prime example is the Brighton Pavilion, redesigned for the Prince Regent by John Nash between 1815 and 1822). The gardens are similarly exotic and romantic, combining subtropical palms and tropical tree ferns with rose trees and even conifers, a wilfully eclectic blend ideally suited to Franco's dreamlike approach to narrative. When we first see Emmanuelle, she's getting into her chauffeured limousine beside the Palácio da Cidadela de Cascais (at 108 Av. Dom Carlos I), previously seen in *Voodoo Passion* and *Je brûle de partout*.

Connections: When Emmanuelle responds to being raped – first with shock, then arousal, and then with euphoric pronouncements of sexual liberation – one's first impulse is to gasp. Is this not exactly what the anti-pornography wing of the women's movement claims all pornography is saying? It has to be said that the waters are muddy in Franco's treatment of this theme. Rape had been depicted frequently in Franco's earlier films, and not always responsibly. 99 *Women* for instance treats lesbian rape as something the victim suddenly 'gets into' with the most crass manipulation possible: the addition of sensual saxophone music on the soundtrack, and the shift from raw and frenzied to dreamy soft-focus. In that instance, as I asserted in *Murderous Passions*, the responsibility lay partly with the scriptwriter and producer Harry Alan Towers, whose young wife Maria Röhm played the victim in the scene. Later depictions of rape in Franco's work between 1968 and 1980 are frequent but largely intended to convey horror and brutality. They are less concerned with soft-soap erotica and more concerned with violent S&M fantasy. In films like *Barbed Wire Dolls* rape is an ingredient in a fantasy world dominated by cruelty, and its ethical status is dependent on cruelty as the defining feature of the narrative... *Aberraciones* revisits two of Franco's most enduring visual tropes, the listless drug party (first seen in *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, 1964) and the erotic performance piece (*The Diabolical Dr. Z*, 1965; *Necronomicon*, 1967), and combines them into one sequence, spicing up the result with one of his favourite condiments, incest. A rather frigid 'acid party', intentionally portrayed as silly and boring, is enlivened when a guest – erotic dancer Lina Romay – reveals that her nude partner, who sits rigidly with eyes drawn onto his closed eyelids, is actually her sixteen-year-old son. This snippet of information comes after she's spent five minutes of screen time 'fellating' the youth's fingers. What's more, she cheerily admits that she took her son's 'cherry' some time earlier. (The scene echoes an earlier one in which the youth was a guest on Andreas's boat, prompting Emmanuelle to admit that thinking about seducing him made her "feel incestuous!")

Other versions: In Paris, some time during the summer of 1982, actor and director Olivier Mathot (aka 'Claude Plaut') supervised a second version of *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, released by Eurociné as *Cecilia* (currently available on Region 1 DVD). The choice of title rather ignores the fact that another erotic film called *Cecilia* directed by 'Jeremy Gold' (aka Alain Payet) played in France in the early 1980s: details are sketchy but it's either Payet's *Rien ne vaut la première fois* (1981) or *Jeux*

interdits pour collégiennes en chaleur (1979). The differences amount to approximately seventeen extra minutes and a handful of altered music cues, but while the new additions are bearable enough, the tampering with the score is another matter. Three important scenes are affected. Montossé's nude scene in the back seat of the car is spoiled by the imposition of a twee bontempi organ solo that sounds like muzak for a deadly-dull church service (and worse, this inappropriate cue then continues over the subsequent rape scene). The orgy scene also has part of its original, and very clangorous, avant-garde score replaced with the same mediocre organ track. Most vexing of all, though, is the damage done to the credits sequence. In *Aberraciones*, the opening credits play to a continuous sea-mist of twinkling abstract keyboards, played by Franco and White, but in *Cecilia* the music fades in and out, while the new credit captions impose freeze-frame after ugly freeze-frame on Franco's fluid, exploratory camerawork. On the plus side, Mathot sensibly removes all music immediately after the rape, when Emmanuelle steps nude from her car to be greeted by her shocked husband, thus giving the scene more credibility – in *Aberraciones*, a bucolic guitar theme continues apace, as if Andreas's shock is not worth underlining.

The additional scenes in *Cecilia* are as follows:

1. A flashback (four minutes) portraying the heroine's trip to Paris. This summery material must have been filmed after 16 June 1982, because a cinema on the Champs-Élysées is showing *On s'en fout... nous on s'aime* by Michel Gérard, released in Paris on that date. Billed alongside it we can just make out Jean-Pierre Mocky's *Y a-t-il un Français dans la salle?*, which opened in Paris in April 1982.
2. A party scene (three-and-a-half minutes) in which Pierre Taylou tries to seduce Montossé.
3. A daylight shot (nine seconds) of Khan looking to the shore from his ship.

Several scenes originating from the original Spanish shoot play longer in *Cecilia*. They include:

1. Emmanuelle and Andreas discussing sexual freedom on the terrace at Monserrate (two and a half minutes longer).
2. The horse-riding scene (thirty seconds longer).
3. The drug party/performance art scene includes new shots of Romay reflected in a glass table, a man playing a North African stringed instrument, and Romay doing a partial strip before approaching her son and rubbing his hand on her breasts (two minutes longer).
4. After the consensual group sex scene at the shack, Khan's brother Al drives the heroine home and leaves her at the gates of Monserrate, where he tells her that Khan loves her and has gone away to sea because "he's a proud man" (roughly four minutes longer).

EUGÉNIE HISTORIA DE UNA PERVERSIÓN

(Spanish theatrical title)

Eugénie Story of a Perversion

Spain, 1980

Alternative titles

Lolita am Scheideweg (WG theatrical) *Lolita at the Crossroads*

Erotismo (US Spanish-language video retitling)

Eugenie (Spanish video cover)

Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie (SP DVD)

Eugenie A History of Perversion (English-language video-generated screen title – origin unknown)

De Sade 2000 (shooting title)

Lolita, lemmen papitar (FIN theatrical) *Lolita Priestess of Love*

Production company

J.E. Films

Theatrical distributor

Interdistribucion Cinematografica, S.A.

Timeline

Shooting date	July-August	1980
Spanish approval date	30 January	1981
Madrid	21 February	1981
German 18-cert 52180 issued	23 February	1981
Germany	05 March	1981
Seville	15 May	1981
Cartagena	06 June	1981
Barcelona	09 November	1981

Theatrical running times

Spain	96m
Germany	77m05s

Video/DVD running times (converted where necessary)

German PAL VHS	73m50s
Spain 'MDVC/Caliente' NTSC VHS	94m35s

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Julián Esteban**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: Luis Durá Colombo*, **Ángel Ordiales**. production assistants: Juan Almirall*, **Draguy Steiner** [as 'Draky Steiner']. art director: Antonio de Cabo*. make-up: **Guillermina Guerrero**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Maria Almirall']. editor: Nicole Guettard*. [& GER: **Gise Neumann**]. music: **Jesús Franco**, **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. music recording: **Eurosonic**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording: **Magna Films, S.A.**. titles: **Story Film – Pablo Núñez**. Eastmancolor. SP pressbook adds: based on a book by **Marquis De Sade**. Uncredited: camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Katja Bienert** (Eugénie Tanner). **Mabel Escaño** (Alba De Rosa). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Alberto de Rosa). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Sultana aka Princess Irina Von Karlstein (dialogue)/Ana [pressbook]). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Squios'] (Erwin Tanner). **Leonardo Melo Acosta** [as 'Melo Costa'] (Walter, blind guitarist). Uncredited: **Evelyne Bienert** (Mrs. Tanner, Eugénie's mother). *The Manacoa Files* adds: **Maria Gonzales** [aka 'María del Carmen González'].**

* 'Juan Almirall' (aka Joan Almirall, Lina Romay's brother) is credited onscreen as production assistant. However, Juan Soler and Antonio Mayans state that Almirall never worked on any of Franco's films. His name was often used as a pseudonym by Franco, usually for camera credits, or to make up the requisite number of Spanish credits for co-production financing purposes. According to Juan Soler, the credits for Antonio De Cabo, Luis Durá Colombo and Nicole Guettard are also falsified.

** Six further names listed by *Obsession* and the IMDb are actually cast members from Franco's *Sadomania* and do not appear in this film. There are literally no other characters left to credit, unless we count fleeting passers-by in the pool scene.

Lolita am scheideweg incorporates material from *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* (1978) featuring the following performers: **Bea Fiedler** (blonde woman in Lolita's fantasies). **Elisa Servier** (2nd blonde woman in Lolita's fantasies). **Philippe Garnier** (man having sex in wicker chair in Lolita's fantasies). **Otto Retzer** (shaven-headed rapist in Lolita's hallucination). **Roger Clency** (black rapist in Lolita's hallucination). Note: IMDb says that Aline Mess (from Franco's *Devil Hunter* and *Diamonds of Kilimanjaro*) is in the Hubert Frank film, but I disagree: Mess is darker-skinned, and has uneven front teeth with a prominent gap between the front incisors, whereas the vaguely similar girl in *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* is lighter-skinned with even teeth.

Synopsis: *Alberto De Rosa brings his sister Alba back from a sanatorium for a holiday at a luxury apartment on the coast. There they enjoy incestuous sex and keep a female slave called Sultana. Alba has been instructed by her doctor to avoid too much excitement, but Alberto cannot resist telling her about a beautiful teenage girl called Eugénie Bressac who is staying in a neighbouring apartment with her parents. Alberto spies on the girl as she suns herself and swims, and uses binoculars to peer through her bedroom window. Erotically incensed by the girl, he persuades Alba to help him seduce her. Alba begins by seducing Eugénie's father Erwin. Enslaving him into sadomasochism she demands that he let Alberto deflower his daughter. Erwin cannot resist and accepts her demand, and so Alberto and Alba, together with Sultana, take Eugénie away with them to their holiday home further up the coast. There they live with a handsome blind teenager called Walter who has lived with them since his birth "like part of the family". That evening the couple ply Eugénie with drink and drugs and seduce her into a disorientating night of sex, during which they ravish the girl. The next morning Eugénie walks to the beach*

where Alberto is crafting a series of hauntingly realistic sand sculptures of naked female bodies, arranged in sexualised postures. When she asks him what they are, he says they represent the women he has murdered, but Alba quickly adds that it's just a macabre joke. On her way back to the house Eugénie talks to Walter, and the two of them kiss tenderly. That night Alberto goes to the beach and talks to the sand sculptures. In his mind he hears one of them, apparently his deceased wife, chastise him for killing her. He begs her forgiveness but says he must kill again: this time Eugénie. The following evening, Alberto, Alba, Sultana and Eugénie gather in the bedroom where they smoke kif from a burner. The party turns sexual with Eugénie once again the focus of attention. This time events take on a sadistic hue, with Alba flogging Eugénie. Walter, who has been in the room playing guitar all the while, decides he can accept no more, and leaves. Overcome by the erotic excitement of recent events, Alba goes into convulsions. Alberto gleefully informs her that he has deliberately set up the situation to get rid of her. The doctor's advice was that too much emotion could propel her into "ultimate madness, or death". Unable to take the shock, she expires. Next, Alberto leads the ever-needy Sultana to his bedroom where she begs to be taken from behind like a dog. Alberto fucks her while holding her on a collar and chain. As he climaxes he smothers her with a pillow. After the drugs have worn off, Eugénie comes downstairs to find no one in the house. She walks down to the beach where Alberto is finishing a sand sculpture of his latest victim: Sultana. When Eugénie tries to run away, Alberto catches her and gloats that he has killed them all – Alba, Walter and Sultana – adding, "I will kill you too, but first I will make love to you for the last time." Eugénie breaks free, and finding a harpoon gun fires it at Alberto, spearing him square in the stomach and killing him. In a daze she heads back to the beach. Overcome with horror, she destroys the sand sculptures of Alberto's victims.

Production notes: *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* was a sign of things to come in Franco's career. It rolled out a newly stripped-back version of his cinema: bright light, colourful compositions, an emphasis on clarity and a generally more restrained use of the camera. His hand-held style and use of zooms don't entirely disappear, but there's a steadying of the tiller when it comes to framing and photographic quality. Some of this is down to the influence of lighting cameraman Juan Soler, although Soler himself stresses that Franco remained in full control of the camera and would decide if and when to follow his technical guidance. Franco himself was especially fond of this film, as he told me in 2010: "I don't say that I like my films at all... but that is one of the best I made during that period."¹

The release of a German version of this film almost simultaneously with the Spanish one leads me to suspect that there may have been some German production finance involved. If this is correct, it was probably Lisa Film (Munich) or Rapid Film (Munich) who contributed: during the shoot for *Eugénie* Franco was asked to help on a German production that had gotten into difficulties in nearby Alicante: the film in question, *Kalt wie Eis*, was produced by these two Munich-based companies. Moreover,

Franco went on to sign a deal with Lisa and Rapid for his next trio of pictures: *Sadomania*, *Bloody Moon* and *Linda*. It would not be surprising if Franco used his brief stint on *Kalt wie Eis* to coax a deal out of the Germans for *Eugénie* while securing a relationship for future productions. Also indicative of a business connection with the Germans is the fact that *Lolita am Scheideweg* includes scenes from Hubert Frank's 1978 sex film *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* aka *Island of 1000 Delights*. Franco's *Linda* was also spliced with material from a Hubert Frank film, *Vanessa* (1977). Both *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* and *Vanessa* were produced by Lisa Film, co-producers of *Linda* and *Kalt wie Eis*.

Review: This extraordinary film is Franco's fourth visit to the well of the Marquis De Sade's 1795 novella *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Nevertheless, it's very much a new piece of work, bringing a spellbinding minimalism to bear on the material. Made for Julián Esteban's J.E. Films, it's the equal of such extraordinary Franco works as *Shining Sex* (1975) and *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray* (1975), sharing with them long stretches of disorientating narcotic sex and a sense of time standing still under pressure of the director's voyeuristic gaze. Minimalist, highly concentrated, and often very beautiful, it's Franco's most mesmerising treatment of his by now familiar Sadean tale of two lovers, brother and sister, who spy upon a beautiful young girl and decide to seduce her into sexual slavery. The girl in question is played by Katja Bienert, a German actress whose early entry into films of an erotic nature has stirred comment about the suitability of the roles she was taking. She was approaching her fourteenth birthday at the time *Eugénie* was shot, which means her appearance in the film was entirely in accordance with Spanish law both then and now. Her mother was present at all times during the shoot, and Franco chose his shots carefully, never crossing the line from nudity to graphic sexual contact. Nevertheless, the attitude of law in English-speaking countries means that this, and other Bienert films of the period, are impossible to distribute in Great Britain or the USA.

The credit sequence of *Eugénie*... is immediately stunning, featuring shots of weird sand sculptures on a sunny beach. These are not sandcastles – they are sculptures of the female form, lewdly positioned, with legs spread to reveal vaginal lips, or else crouching with head to the ground as if for unimpeded rear entry. This sexual abandon in such an odd context is immediately unsettling, as is the post-credits sequence in which we meet 'Sultana' (Lina Romay), an apparently unhinged sex slave with a chain around her neck, who cringes and yelps like a desperate puppy for her masters, Alberto and Alba Rosa (Antonio Mayans and Mabel Escaño). Later we learn that 'Sultana' was bought by the De Rosas at a slave market, "in the heart of the Sahara"...

Alberto and Alba make their move on Eugénie at a slow, languorous pace, allowing us to savour each revelation and development. The 'action' is sparse, indolent, drowsy, yet far from boring; everything simmers with a sick noonday stillness, as if the sun itself is incubating an evil demon of perversity within



Lolita
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TOP: Sultana (Lina Romay) awaits orders from her owners, Alba (Mabel Escañó) and Alberto (Antonio Mayans).
 BOTTOM L: Eugenie (Katja Bienert) is propositioned by Alberto. BOTTOM R: Alberto takes Sultana for a walk around the Muralla Roja.



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TOP L: Eugénie is accosted by the unhinged Alberto. TOP R: Eugénie kisses her father (Antonio Rebollo), unaware that he has already 'given' her to the De Rosas.
BOTTOM: Blind guitarist and silent witness Walter (Leonardo Melo Acosta) is the only friend Eugénie has in a film of relentless exploitation.

the incestuous leads. The innocence of youth on the verge of knowledge, defiled by ravishment and deceit; this is the theme of the film, and it's through the eyes of the Sadean imagination that we watch Eugénie's slow capitulation. A young woman so gentle, so kind and sweet, so spied upon at every turn. Even her teddy bear, peeking into view as she lounges nude on the sofa, seems to stare at her lasciviously. As if reading the audience's dirty minds, Franco has Eugénie pick up the toy and slowly rub it against her crotch. Franco, who knows the psychology of voyeurism all too well, gives this stuffed toy an experience many in the audience would dearly have wished for themselves...

The drug-enhanced ravishment of Eugénie is one of the most narcotic, otherworldly sex scenes that Franco ever filmed. The director and his camera are hooked magnetically to the contours of an ever-circling lust. The photography is incredible; lips, eyes and nipples are shown in huge closeups that turn flesh into landscapes of abstract desire. (Remember the scenes in *Blue Velvet* where David Lynch's camera scrutinises Isabella Rossellini? At his best, Franco approaches Lynch in the creation of worlds beyond time and space, and sometimes seems to have a door key to the mysteries of the Black Lodge.) With each shot adding to the intensely lysergic effect, we can only marvel as Franco once again summons his unique and special magic to the screen. We're swimming in a sea of images, where time recedes like a distant tide, leaving us in pools of suspended consciousness.

Eugénie's air of unreality is further adumbrated by the character of Walter, a good-looking lad in his late teens who lives with the De Rosas. He tells Eugénie, "*There are often people like me around. Even if they're just imaginary,*" a line which puts one in mind of the unexplained 'watcher' at the start of Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), who observes the arrival of the alien protagonist but never interacts with the story from thereon. This notion of a character who lies between reality and abstraction, somehow observing though blind in the real world, suggests that Franco is seeking to position the story beyond the reach of realism. Nevertheless, Walter is real to the characters in the film: he is seen by them, spoken to by them, and cared about by Eugénie. He is therefore something of a loose end: his gnomic dialogue is not sufficiently supported by the manner of his depiction so we must revert to the assumption that he's basically real. Even then, his place in the household is never fully explained, although given that Alberto and Alba are dominated by the erotic imperative one doubts they've taken care of him simply out of charity. If he does have erotic currency in the De Rosas' lives, it's never shown: the youth enjoys a chaste and tender kiss with Eugénie but his role is otherwise passive, disengaged. While atrocities pile up he plays his Spanish guitar, a lonely decorator of the household ambience. Even when the De Rosas drug and ravish Eugénie, he remains an onlooker, strumming away while the girl descends into a fog of sex and drugs. Only when Alba whips the girl does he respond, and even then it's only to walk out saying he can take no more. He is a casualty of Franco's habitual disdain for secondary male characters:

Alberto snarls "*I'll deal with you later,*" and when confronted by Eugénie afterwards he claims to have killed the boy. That Franco neglects to fill in this character, or show us his unhappy fate, is a side-effect of his erotic tunnel-vision; a regrettable flaw in an otherwise marvellous construction.

During a long, pivotal scene, the virtuous flower of Eugénie's awakening sexuality is shown to possess perverse qualities. We see her suggestively removing a doll's panties, resting its face between her legs, and caressing her own nipples with the plastic hands. Is Eugénie fantasizing sexual abuse? Or is she already the victim of abuse, and 'acting out' unconsciously? Her father betrays her to the De Rosas: is that betrayal simply the latest indignity in a life of broken trust? Or is Eugénie spontaneously indulging forbidden sexual fantasies in nascent form? In De Sade, you'll remember, Eugénie becomes an enthusiastic libertine once 'initiated', cheerfully committing the most appalling acts of violence, mostly upon her mother. (Such scenes have never made their way into any of Franco's adaptations, such is the depth and brutality of Sade's mother-hatred). Here she's appalled by Alberto's murders, but she's also oddly passive, never calling the police or running to fetch help. (Calling the police is a choice notably absent in Franco's erotic narratives: see for instance *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* (1980) and *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* (1982). His crime stories are a different matter, but the erotic films operate in a universe without the option of the law. Transgression of the law is a given, personal freedom must flourish against the restrictions of taboo, and victims have nowhere to turn.)

Katja Bienert is completely otherworldly, encompassing childlike indifference and emerging sensuality in one extraordinary package. Franco was clearly impressed by her, casting her in another four films during the 1980s – *Linda* (1981), *El lago de las virgenes* (1981), *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* (1983), and *Lilian the Perverted Virgin* (1983). It's just a shame that controversy prevents *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* from being more widely available, as it's easily the best of the films she made with Franco (the less said about 2002's *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula* the better).

As this is another of Franco's loose adaptations of the Marquis De Sade, the question arises once again of how closely Franco identifies with the amoral outlook of his protagonists. The evidence in this case points to a high degree of ambivalence. The film may seem a slave to the compulsive joy of voyeurism, but the dialogue puts some distance between the joys of the camera and the attitude of the central character. This becomes clear ten minutes into the film, during the scene in which Alberto watches Eugénie swim and shower on the roof of Muralla Roja. After we've seen Eugénie enjoying the water, oblivious to the watchful Alberto, we hear the voyeur's ruminations in voice-over, and they point to a particular strain of bad faith typical of your ethically evasive sort of pervert: "*I love her so much, and I hate her at the same time. Because of her lack of decency. For the perversion that she has in her eyes, in her movements. For the conscious provocation of her whole being.*" Eugénie is in fact oblivious to Alberto; the 'provocation' and 'perversion' is all in

his mind, projected onto the girl. This is partly resentment of her casual power to obsess him, partly the forlorn fantasy that she's bewitching him deliberately. Alberto's assertion that he loves and hates Eugénie is a twisted form of masochism, the sort that rejects itself, fleeing into sadism to escape being overwhelmed by the contemplation of beauty. It's also a form of auto-absolution, the self-exculpation of the rapist and molester: the same as suggesting that women who dress attractively are asking to be raped. By giving Alberto these lines, which express his philosophical naivety and ethical cowardice, Franco draws a sharp line between his own joyous rapture behind the camera, and the confused nonsense which passes for libertinage in the mind of Alberto.

Cast and crew: Katja Bienert is a revelation, projecting just the right air of naivety and awakening knowledge. Being aware of her tender years during the shoot, and curious to find out how she felt about the film and the controversy surrounding it, I spoke to her in 2011. She informed me that she was chaperoned throughout the production by her mother: "*My mum Evelynne Bienert was in showbiz as an artist, actress, writing lyrics, being an agent. She did the very first photos of me and I was recognised by two German photographers, Lutz 'Lucky' Stark and Jim Rakete. [author's note: Rakete is a prominent German photographer who was Nina Hagen's manager during her early career.] Soon I got a lot of casting invitations. Also my Granny, in her youth, taught dance and acting at a school in Hellerau-Laxenburg near Vienna, where famous actors like Diana Grace and Evelynne Künnecke were taught. She was my first instructor and critic!*" Bienert found Franco to be a careful and considerate director: "*As Jess always respected and accepted me being a teenager who goes to school, he mostly worked with me at the time of the German summer holidays, which is July/August. It took a few weeks, six to eight, not like nowadays!*" She describes co-star Lina Romay as, "*Smooth, voluptuous and sexy as a cat, and absolutely in love with Jess. A real muse! Her brother was also involved working for the production.*"² Of Mayans and Rebollo she says, "*Antonio Mayans is still in contact with me. I remember he has three beautiful daughters, all of them doing movies. I also remember his wife as she often showed up on set. He was a nice macho and had this flirting attitude. Tony Skios was a kind of hermit, he didn't talk much, but he was perfectly chosen.*" Regarding the darker currents of the film, and their source in the Marquis De Sade, Bienert recalls, "*At that time I read a lot of Jules Verne! A few years ago I saw a very artistic movie about De Sade's life. He was a rebel, fighting authorities, somehow like a politician... It was done with puppets [Henri Xhonneux's Marquis, 1989]. I once saw the Fura del Baus, a radical Spanish theatre group, in Málaga at the Teatro Cervantes, doing a play about De Sade. I had to leave the theatre – too cruel...*" She has fond memories of the extraordinary beach sculpture scene: "*As it was a public beach and people were already attracted by these marvellous sculptures, done by a Spanish artist, the beach was crowded when I was running around in the nude. It was hard to break this delicious scenery, pretend to be mad, desperate and in solitude... I hope it looked quite elegant!*"³ Both Bienert and her mother were very pleased with the results: "*We loved it, it's one of Jess's masterpieces. Last year, the Zinema in Berlin*

showed Diamonds of Kilimandjaro – unfortunately they were too shy to show Eugénie."⁴

The reason for this shyness is the delicate matter of Katja's age when the film was made. Born on 1 September 1966, she was not yet fourteen when the film was shot, in July and August of 1980. Obviously this sets off alarm bells in the mind of the modern viewer, so we must tread carefully while taking full account of variations in national temperament. Spain's age of consent is, and always has been, lower than Great Britain's. It's been thirteen since 1998, before which it was twelve. As a German national, Bienert was brought up in a culture where the age of consent was fourteen. If you talk about this to most Germans or Spaniards they would find the British default position of moral outrage perplexing and absurd. As with all 'moral absolutes', right and wrong vary from culture to culture and there's no evidence to suggest that young people living in Spain grow up any more debauched or traumatised than those in Great Britain. In cinematic terms, a comparable situation is the early career of Brooke Shields, who was fourteen when she starred in Randal Kleiser's tropical 'coming-of-age' hit *The Blue Lagoon* (1980), and just twelve when she appeared in Louis Malle's bordello-themed drama *Pretty Baby* (1978). *Eugénie, historia de una perversion* is more erotically charged than either of those films, but it's not a 'sex film' and certainly not a porno film. In the scenes involving Bienert Franco used careful editing and camerawork to construct the *impression* of ravishment. Notably, no one in the cast even gets between Bienert's legs: whenever Alberto or Alba embrace Eugénie, Franco shoots from behind the seducer, whose body is positioned to conceal Bienert's. The legs of the seducer and the legs of the girl remain angled away from one another. In Germany, laws regarding the age of consent have nuances written into them regarding the use of exploitative manipulation to coerce teenagers into sex: if a young person under eighteen registers a complaint, the law steps in, regardless of the age of consent. The issue of exploitation, not just numerical status, is the key: when Brooke Shields was asked whether she had ever felt exploited in her early roles, she replied, "*I didn't. Because I was so young. I was too young for the casting couch so I was never told: 'You have to do this to get a role.'*"⁵ The irony of a teenage actress being too young for the exploitation that occurs routinely with actresses over the age of consent is worth dwelling on... Finally, it's important to stress that there has never been a hint of impropriety with regard to Franco's personal treatment of Bienert (or any other actress for that matter). In an interview with Andreas Bethmann in 1999, Bienert declared that she had absolutely no regrets making films with Franco, and would happily star in sequels should they ever occur!⁶ Sure enough, Franco subsequently cast her in his 2002 opus *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula*. When I asked her what she thought of *Eugénie, historia de una perversion* being banned in the UK, she replied, "*That's the biggest advertising you could do for the movie: People will be more curious!*"⁷

On the masculine side of the story, *Eugénie, historia de una perversion* sees the debut of Antonio Rebollo (aka "Tony Skios" or



'Tony Squios'), a saturnine presence in nine Franco films, the last being *Bahía blanca* in 1984. He doesn't have a lot of range, but he delivers all that's asked of him in Franco's minimalist scenarios; chiefly an air of smouldering menace. He's excellent as the hard-as-nails crime boss brought low by the murder of his son in *Bahía blanca*, but his most memorable role is the misogynistic Spanish nobleman in *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* (1982) who claims to be the ultimate Latin lover but instead proves to be an arrogant blowhard for whom 'hot sex' takes less than a minute ... In his role as lighting cameraman, recent addition Juan Soler adds minimalist lustre and elegance to the diaphanous plot and holds the effects of a shrinking budget at bay. His input is considerable, making him the most significant addition to Franco's talent pool after actor/production-lieutenant Antonio Mayans.

Music: The bordello piano theme from 1975's *Midnight Party* is used again. The insistent signature tune from *Las chicas de Copacabana* returns too, and we're treated to a preview of the mournful acoustic guitar number that will play a much greater role in the following year's *La noche de los sexos abiertos*. Most mesmerising of all is the music which plays during the drug-soaked ravishment scene. Franco himself concocted this piece which lends a similarly mesmeric atmosphere to *Macumba Sexual* (1980).

Locations: Returning to Calpe in southern Spain, and the insanely beautiful postmodern apartment complex called 'La Manzanera', designed by Ricardo Bofill, Franco demonstrates his supremely canny eye for a wonderful 'cash-onscreen' visual resource. La Manzanera comprises two apartment blocks: Xanadu (used as a key exterior location for 1970's *She Killed in Ecstasy* and 1973's *Countess Perverse*) and La Muralla Roja ('The Red Wall') which was the hub of activity in Franco's unreleased film *El misterio del castillo rojo* (1973) and whose tumultuous stairwells can be seen in *Countess Perverse*. *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* marks the first time we can feast our eyes on the full exterior structure of La Muralla Roja, a pleasure later granted in *La noche de los sexos abiertos* (1981) and *Sola ante el terror* (1983). Bofill's extraordinary designs flirt with urban modernism but then escalate plain geometry into mad cubist joy, in a way that the artist Max Escher would surely have loved. Painted an imposing shade of red on the outside, and a selection of elegant pinks and blues for the rooftop pool area, the Muralla Roja's 90-degree angles and crenelated outlines are cool and yet somehow crazed: the perfect home for a pair of rich amoral perverts. Franco had always enjoyed unimpeded access to the Manzanera complex, a fact which had to be underlined for an inexperienced supervisor in 1980, when Franco returned there after an absence of six years. As he explained to Alain Petit in 1992: "Bofill never authorized any movie to be shot in that complex. But I had been friends with him since the Franco regime during which he came to my house to hide! So, I found this beautiful place where they wouldn't even let me in. I called Ricardo and said, 'Listen, I'm in Manzanera...'—'What are you doing there?'—'I'm here to shoot a movie but they're not letting me.'—'Put that asshole on!'—And he told the supervisor that I was to be allowed to shoot whatever I wanted wherever I wanted."⁸

Connections: Elements from Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* had made their way into numerous Franco films before, and *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* combines elements from three of these earlier adaptations: *Eugénie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (1969), *How to Seduce a Virgin* (1973) and *Cocktail spécial* (1978). From *Eugénie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* we get a woman's strategic seduction of a young girl's father, with the added twist (ported over from *Cocktail spécial*) that it's not just common-or-garden lust that makes him surrender his daughter to the libertines, but the masochistic, subservient variety. From *How to Seduce a Virgin* comes the emphasis on the voyeuristic gaze, as the De Rosas spend the first half of the film daydreaming, spying and conspiring, before making their move on Eugénie ... The sexual penetration of Eugénie takes place offscreen, and it's represented by two shots: a photo of a chrysanthemum (a flower symbolic of death in Spain, where they're used exclusively for funeral decoration); and a swift pan across the painting 'Sleep' by Salvador Dali. As the flower of innocence opens to the rapist, the cut to Dali's picture brings the scene to a strangely limp climax. Is the famous image (a sleeping head, its sagging, deflated, balloon-like structure supported by crutches in the sand) Franco's representation of the way disappointment and ennui (not to mention a limp penis) follow hot on the heels of libertinage? If not, then the significance is elusive. The empty vista in which Dali's sleeper rests may echo the high summer stillness of *Eugénie*, but as for anything more, it's difficult to say. The drug-fuelled seduction of Eugénie involves a narcotic suspension of quotidian time, but the film is not precisely a dream narrative; it's a story well grounded in the real world of manipulation and exploitation. Apart from this solitary glimpse of a surrealist painting, events are depicted without the use of oneiric signifiers. The pan to the deflated far end of the sleeping head could be representative of decline and impotence (a frequent Dali preoccupation), but to what end? The defloration of the virgin appears to have been successful, after all. Franco is not without his faults and one of them is an occasional weakness for random juxtapositions which can seem like cultural posturing; as with many of the fine art and high culture references in his celebrated *Necronomicon* (1967) this allusion to Dali was probably very casual and impulsive but risks coming across as pretentious ... Eugénie's line whilst high, in which she describes her attackers as "friends who come from the other side of the clouds, from the other side of music", echoes the wistful imagery of Franco's *Female Vampire* (1973), in which the lovelorn Baron von Rathony (Jack Taylor) begs the vampire Irina Karlstein (Lina Romay), "Will you take me with you one day, behind the mist?"

Other versions: The most complete version of *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* currently available is the one released on video in the 1980s by the Los Angeles based Caliente Video (aka Million Dollar Video Corp) under the title *Erotismo*. Sadly, despite being released in the States this was a non-subtitled version, aimed solely at the Spanish-speaking market. The onscreen title 'Erotismo' is video-generated, replacing the original *Eugénie, historia de una perversión*

Lolita am Scheideweg

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Lolita
am
Scheideweg



MAIN PICTURE: Just a sadomasochistic psychopathic couple and their live-in love slave, off for a drive in the country.

LEFT: Drugs open the doors to perception, but more importantly they open the legs of young girls... Alberto and Alba prepare to deflower the virginal Eugénie.

ABOVE: Alba's skills as a dominatrix are too much for masochistic sex addict Erwin Tanner (Antonio Rebollo), who surrenders his teenage daughter in return for more abjection.



Lolita
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Scheideweg

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MAIN PICTURE: Eugénie destroys Alberto's lewd and disturbing sand sculptures.

LEFT: Alberto looks with contempt at Alba before deciding to terminate their relationship, a scene which returns to a common theme in Franco's Sadean tales: the libertine is always totally alone.

ABOVE: The De Rosas and their slave Sultana seek to draw Eugénie into their world of sex and sadism.

title card. There are currently no versions available which retain the original screen title. Spanish official sources give a theatrical running time for *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* of 96 minutes, but if one converts *Erotismo's* NTSC video running time to the film equivalent the result is 94m34s, which suggests that footage is missing. This is confirmed by careful scrutiny of the very different German cut, *Lolita am Scheideweg*, which includes several shots definitely filmed by Franco during his original shoot which do not appear in *Erotismo*. Here then is a list of the major differences between *Eugénie/Erotismo* and *Lolita am Scheideweg*. The first eight minutes are the same in both versions, but numerous differences emerge after that, until the two versions converge again for the last five minutes. For concision I will refer to the US release as *Eugénie* and the German version as *Lolita*:

1. The biggest change, profoundly altering the tone of the film, is the replacement of *Eugénie's* Daniel White score with music for *Lolita* by the German composer Gerhard Heinz. Scenes that possess a malign avant-garde decadence in the original version become much lighter in tone thanks to Heinz's disco grooves and tinkling synthesiser melodies, redolent of the French disco group Space. While these cues are very pleasing in their own way, they play up the 'sun, sex and surf' aspect of the film, as if the aim was to create a more typical softcore porno film, performing a 180-degree shift from the original cues which, on the contrary, bounce between a ghostly bordello ambience and an aura of psychedelic evil. Heinz's music would also grace Franco's *Linda* and *Bloody Moon*, made soon after, indeed *Linda* features many of the same cues used in *Lolita*. However, the same cues first appeared two years earlier, in Hubert Frank's 1978 sex film *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* aka *Island of 1000 Delights*, of which more in a moment...
2. The sequence of events during the first half hour of *Eugénie* is compressed to reduce Alba and Alberto spying on their young quarry. In some cases, shots from one spying sequence are cut together with shots of *Eugénie* from another. Here are the spying scenes in *Eugénie*, listed in the order in which they occur, ending thirty-three minutes into the film: (A) From the rooftop of Muralla Roja, Alberto spies on (B) *Eugénie* swimming in the rooftop's pool. (C) Alberto and Alba have sex on their apartment balcony, while spying on (D) *Eugénie* walking along the beach. (E) From the ruined castle, Alberto and Alba spy on (F) *Eugénie* sunbathing on a neighbouring rooftop. (G) From the ruined castle, Alberto and Alba spy on (H) *Eugénie* masturbating in her apartment. Now, here are the spying scenes in *Lolita*, in the order in which they occur, ending just sixteen minutes into the film. I've used the same letters to show how the shots have been re-arranged: (E) From the ruined castle, Alberto and Alba spy on (B) *Eugénie* swimming in the rooftop's pool. (E) From the ruined castle, Alberto and Alba spy on (F) *Eugénie* sunbathing on a neighbouring rooftop. From the list we can see that whoever edited *Lolita* decided to curtail the De Rosa's voyeurism, bringing it to an end twice as quickly. The elements left on the cutting room floor include (A) Antonio on the rooftop of Muralla Roja, (C) the scene on the De Rosas' balcony, and (D) *Eugénie* walking along the beach. The first sequence was probably deemed redundant or repetitious, and the second includes several very bleached out shots in which the camera iris has been set for indoor photography and then pointed into blazing sunshine, a frequent artistic peccadillo of Franco's which may have been perceived as a technical shortcoming by the Germans. It's also notable that shots E, G and H have either been dropped or reconfigured. The scene in which the De Rosas use binoculars to peer into *Eugénie's* apartment has been dismantled. The shots of Alberto and Alba are used instead to tie in with *Eugénie's* rooftop swim, and the scene they were originally watching, namely *Eugénie* masturbating with a teddy bear, is now a solitary interlude. The decision may have been taken because Franco's editing in *Eugénie* doesn't quite 'sell' the scene. The distance involved, the mismatched lighting, the framing, the angles, the spatial arrangement of the castle in relation to the apartment; these elements are so casually slung together in *Eugénie* that successful voyeurism seems highly unlikely! The editors of *Lolita* chose instead to intercut the girl's masturbation with 'fantasies' culled from another film entirely, which brings us to:
3. Another major change in *Lolita* is the frequent use of scenes from Hubert Frank's 1978 sex film *Die Insel der tausend Freuden* aka *Island of 1000 Delights*. They are used to represent *Lolita's* fantasies as she masturbates, or her drug-induced hallucinations when she's ravished by the De Rosas. Among the images in *Eugénie's* spaced out imagination, we see two blonde girls (Bea Fiedler and Elisa Servier) making out on a beach and then again in a darkened bedroom; Fiedler sitting astride a young white man (Philippe Garnier) having sex in a wicker chair; a black man (Roger Clency) raping a blonde woman; a woman fellating a peeled banana during a live sex show; and a shaven-headed white male (Otto Retzer) forcing a dark-skinned woman to masturbate with a lit candle.
4. In *Eugénie* Alba and Alberto are sister and brother: in *Lolita* Alba refers to Alberto as her stepbrother.
5. The scene at the swimming pool which introduces Erwin Tanner, *Eugénie's* father, removes a lingering shot of the bathers, while the conversation between Erwin and his wife is shortened by the removal of one of Franco's trademark zooms into Mrs. Tanner's crotch.
6. There are many small cuts during consecutive sex scenes between Alba and Alberto, and Alba and Erwin. The former is a classic example of Franco drawing erotic energy from fluctuations of light and shade: a net curtain wafts in the breeze, flapping over the bodies and creating a hazy hypnotic effect as it drifts out of focus between the camera and the two

bodies. In *Lolita* these shots are shorter, and some of the more abstract moments are gone.

7. *Lolita* shortens most of the scenes with Sultana, seemingly intent on removing the more grotesque elements. Missing is a slow zoom into Sultana's face as she whimpers in lust through the window, and trimmed to a fraction of its length is the dinner-party sequence when Alberto becomes irritated by the whimpering Sultana and flogs her (off-camera). *Lolita* does, however, feature a shot not included in *Eugénie*: an overhead view from the roof of La Muralla Roja, depicting Sultana, crawling on all fours, being led on a leash by Alberto to his car in preparation for a trip to their 'holiday home' (La Manzanera, the house in Franco's *Countess Perverse*, which in reality is just a stone's throw from La Muralla Roja).
8. In *Eugénie*, Alba persuades Erwin – grovelling beneath her as she towers above him whip in hand – to surrender his virginal young daughter to Alberto: "It's better she learns about love in the hands of a well mannered man than with a stupid kid of her own age," she reasons, before sealing the deal by pressing her shoe on Erwin's face. *Lolita* drops this scene entirely.
9. *Eugénie*'s low angle tracking shot around the outside of La Manzanera is snipped from *Lolita*, and the sequence showing Eugénie waking up after her drugged ravishment is shortened. *Lolita* inserts a shot of Walter playing guitar into this sequence.
10. *Lolita* snips a scene lasting 1m43s of Alba checking her hair and make-up in a mirror, and trims ten seconds from a shot of Alberto walking down the staircase outside La Manzanera.
11. In *Lolita*, Alba's writhing derangement is intercut with material from another film.
12. In *Lolita* Alberto's taunting of Alba, which leads to her death, ends with a new close-up of Alba's face frothing at the mouth.
13. *Lolita* trims 17s off the following shot of Alberto working on his sand sculpture of the crouching Sultana.

KALT WIE EIS

(German theatrical title)

translation: *Cold as Ice*

some scenes directed by Jess Franco

West Germany, 1980

Production companies

Lisa Film (Munich)

Rapid Film (Munich)

Alternative titles

Strike Back (UK)

Punk angels (I gladiatori del sabato sera) (IT theatrical)

Mahites thanatou (GRE video)

Jääkylmä jengi (FIN video)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa July-August	1980
Germany	11 September	1981

director: **Carl Schenkel**. assistant director (some scenes): **Jess Franco**. producer: **Wolfgang Hartwig**.

Production notes: According to Katja Bienert, "[Jess] was hired as the substitute director for Carl Schenkel, who got sick working in a neighbouring studio in Alicante on his film *Kalt wie Eis*." ¹ Schenkel then apparently returned the favour, hence his assistant director credit on Franco's next film, *Devil Hunter*. Bienert's co-star Antonio Mayans has no recollection of these occurrences, although they would explain how Franco came to direct a film for *Kalt wie Eis*'s German producer Wolfgang Hartwig, whose company Lisa Film bankrolled *Bloody Moon* a few months later.

DEVIL HUNTER

(English-language DVD and Blu-ray title)

Spain, West Germany, France [& Italy], 1980

depósito legal: M-40.285-1980

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

El canibal (SP)*

Jungfrau unter Kannibalen (WG) *Virgin Among Cannibals*

Mangeurs de femmes (FR)* *Eaters of Women*

Alternative titles

Sexo canibal (SP alt. theatrical – SMC listing) *Sex Cannibal*

Il cacciatore di uomini (IT theatrical) *The Man Hunter*

Chasseurs d'hommes (FR video) *Hunters of Men*

Chasseur de l'enfer (FR video) *Hell Hunter*

The Devil Hunter (UK video)

The Man Hunter (US video title)

Manhunter (US video cover)

Jakten På Kidnapparna (SWE video) *Hunt For the Kidnappers*

Manhunter – O Sequestro (BRAZ video)

The Cannibal (pre-release promotional artwork)

The Men Hunter [sic] (pre-release promotional artwork)

Rivière sauvage (1981 CNC Print Archive listing) *Wild River*

Rio Salvaie, Kidnapping Now (shooting title [MF])

Rio salaje (SP production listing)

Note: the last two titles are probably just mis-spellings of **Rio salvaje**

Unconfirmed titles

Mandingo Man Hunter
Hell Hunter

Production companies

J.E. Films (Madrid)
Lisa Film (Munich)
Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

Residenz Film (West Germany)
Avia Films (France)
Filman (Italy)

Timeline

Shooting announced	November	1979
Actual shooting date	16 June-19 July	1980
Dépósito legal number	22 November	1980
German 18-cert 51996 issued	03 December	1980
Germany	05 December	1980
Alleged Spanish release*	03 June	1981
Italy	November	1981
UK video release	November	1981
Lecce (Italy)	13 April	1982
Rome	24 June	1982
Foggia (Italy)	16 July	1982
Biel/Bienne, Switzerland	16 March	1983

Theatrical running times

Germany	80m11s
Spain*	83m

Video, DVD, Blu-ray running times (converted where necessary)

US 'Severin' NTSC Blu-ray	102m05s
GER 'XT Video' PAL DVD (<i>Jungfrau unter Kannibalen</i>)	102m32s
IT 'Cinehollywood' PAL VHS (<i>Il cacciatore di uomini</i>)	94m42s
UK 'Cinehollywood' PAL VHS (<i>The Devil Hunter</i>)	88m56s

*Note, although a poster indicates that French distributor Avia Films were preparing to release the film, there appears to have been no French theatrical release. The Catálogo de Cinespañol shows a Spanish release under the title *Sexo canibal*, but I've been unable to find evidence of it in Spanish press archives.

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. producer: **Julián Esteban**. story: **Julius Valery**. screenplay & dialogue: **Julius Valery, Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistants: **Luis Durá Colombo, Gérard Singer, Ángel Ordiales**. sound: **Jack Orth, Claude Panier**. production manager: **Joaquín Domínguez**. set decorator/art director: **Pierre Chevalier**. make-up: **Guillermina Guerrero**. production assistants: **Otto W. Retzer, Daniel**

Lesoeur, Juan Almirall,* **Draguy Steiner** [as 'Draky Steiner']. assistant directors: **Jean Pierre Ducrox, Carl Schenkel, Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa M. Almirall']. set furnishings [mobiliario]: **Vivai del Sud, Julio Muñoz**. special effects: **Manuel Archilla**. editor: **Nicole Guettard**. music: **Jesús Franco, Daniel J. White**. songs performed by **Carloto Perla**. music recording: **Audiofilm S.A.**. laboratory: **Madrid Film, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio: **Magna Films, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: design and construction of native village and totem: **Angel Caballero**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

* 'Juan Almirall' (aka Joan Almirall, Lina Romay's brother) is credited as production assistant. However, Antonio Mayans states that Almirall never worked on Franco's films. His name was often used as a pseudonym by Franco himself, usually for camera credits, but in all other cases his name was used to make up the requisite number of Spanish credits for co-production financing purposes.

Cast: **Ursula Buchfellner** [as Ursula Fellner] (Laura Crawford, a starlet). **Al Cliver** (Peter Weston). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Jack, the helicopter pilot). **Antonio de Cabo** (Thomas, chief kidnapper). **Gisela Hahn** (Jane, the kidnapper's moll). **Muriel Montossé** [as 'Victoria Adams'] (woman on boat). **Werner Pochath** (Chris). **Leonardo Melo Acosta** [as 'Leonardo Costa'] (Pablito). **Aline Mess** [as 'Lynn Mess'] (tribal priestess). **Yul Sanders** [as 'Claude Boisson'] (Witch-Doctor). **Ana Paula** (1st sacrificial victim). **Oscar Cortina** ** (Robert Goldstein). **Tibi Costa**.

** Oscar Cortina is sometimes said to be producer Julián Esteban appearing under a pseudonym, but Antonio Mayans insists this is not the case.

Synopsis: *Laura Crawford, an actress visiting Spain for a press junket, is abducted by a gang of kidnappers, who spirit her away to the untamed Porto Santo Island and issue a demand for a ransom. Her agent calls Peter Weston, an investigator and adventurer, to deliver the ransom and retrieve her. On arriving at the island to hand over the money (in reality, just sheets of blank paper), Weston is involved in an altercation with the kidnappers, during which Laura escapes into the jungle. Meanwhile, the island's inhabitants, a primitive tribe, make sacrifices to a demonic figure who prowls the jungle attacking and eating human beings. Who will ultimately get their hands on Laura: the rescuers, the kidnappers, or the demon?*

"Have you seen Predator? This is the same as Devil Hunter, except that instead of a monster from another galaxy it's a kind of yeti. It works the same way and the development of the story is the same. I'm not saying they copied my movie because it's going too far to say this, but I always say that if I had not done my film, Predator would not exist. Initially, when the monster attacks people with these strange colors, it's exactly the same." – Jess Franco speaking to *Cine Zine Zone*.

Production notes: *Devil Hunter* was Franco's second cannibal-themed movie in six months, after 1979's Eurociné production *The Cannibals*, but thanks to the tangle of confusion surrounding them both it is sometimes mistakenly listed as the first. When I met him in 2011, Jess Franco told me that *Devil Hunter* was made before *The Cannibals*, and he said so again, albeit rather hesitantly, when discussing both films in an interview on Severin's *Devil Hunter* Blu-ray: "I made the second cannibal film with [Marius Lesoeur]... or was it the first? No, the second cannibal film with him, in Alicante."¹ All the evidence, however, points in the other direction, and while Franco's memory was often sharp, in this case it seems he was mistaken.

The roots of *Devil Hunter* go back to October 1979, when a press article in the magazine *Italian Movie Trade* [vol.4, no.10, October 1979] announced a soon-to-begin project called "The Cannibal", about "a wealthy American girl who is kidnapped for ransom and taken to a remote island..." Here then is the basic plot skeleton of *Devil Hunter*. The mooted director was Franco Prosperi², the film was described as an Italian/Spanish/West German co-production between Filman & Maricar International Film, and shooting was apparently due to begin on 5 November. On 17 October 1979, a full page advert appeared in *Variety*, proclaiming: "Federico G. Aicardi and Angela Pinton present The Cannibal". The artwork depicts a muscular dark-skinned man in a loincloth, brandishing a machete in one hand and a dripping human heart in the other, while a topless Caucasian beauty lounges indifferently before him. Four production companies are listed underneath: Filman (Angela Pinton's well-established Italian production and distribution company, based in Rome), Geiselgasteig Film GmbH (Munich), J.E. Films (Julián Esteban's Madrid-based company), and a company called Maicor, which judging from the spelling was Federico Aicardi's company (probably mis-spelled as 'Maricor' in the *Italian Movie Trade* listing).

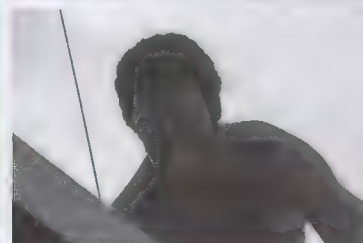
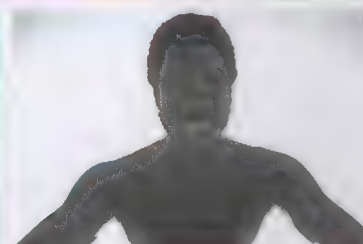
In December 1979, *Italian Movie Trade* listed "The Cannibal" as 'in production'. This, however, was incorrect: for reasons unknown, shooting was in fact delayed for several months. Nothing else was heard about the film until 7 May 1980, when a full-page advert in the Cannes Film Market edition of *Variety* announced the project under a new title: "*The Man Hunter, starring Al Cliver with an international cast*". Filman were now referred to as distributors only, and the production companies were listed as "J.E. Films (Madrid) and Lisa Film GmbH (Munich)". (Lisa Film presumably stepped in when Geiselgasteig Film walked away; the two companies had collaborated before.) Declaring that "*Filming in New York and Mexico starts late May 1980*", the advert described the project as "*A Franco Prosperi film directed by Amando de Ossorio*", which suggests that Prosperi was now attached only as producer. (Amando de Ossorio, of course, was the Spanish director of the excellent 'Blind Dead' zombie films.) Yet at some point before filming, Prosperi unhitched himself entirely and Ossorio bailed out too, one suspects because the budget was shrinking to proportions few directors could cope with.

Enter Jess Franco, adept at working on minuscule budgets: and at last the film gets made. Shooting took place in June and July of 1980, and a Spanish-language print was struck with the title *El canibal* (a direct translation of the originally mooted title "The Cannibal"). For the English-language markets the title was *The Man Hunter*. The film was then touted for sale at the Cannes Film Market in May 1981, with Angela Pinton's Filman handling world sales (alongside a film genuinely directed by Franco Prosperi, 1978's *The Last House on the Beach* aka *La settima donna*). Production was credited to J.E. Films, Lisa Film GmbH, and a third partner: Eurociné (Paris). In interviews, Franco gave Esteban credit for coming up with the story: the scriptwriting credit for 'Julius Valery' is believed to be an Esteban pseudonym. Furthermore, French CNC archive documents declare the film's production percentages as Spain 50%, Germany 30% and France 20%, indicating that Esteban was the majority backer.

Review: This would be judged no more than a confusing and repulsive blur of a movie by conventional standards, but who cares about convention so far into Franco's career? *Devil Hunter* is sufficiently bizarre and illogical to justify praise, if only for its brain-frazzling disorientation. The film is a borderless, structureless entity, an impression compounded by an extraordinary soundtrack full of echoed shrieks and moans, and Franco's ability to grossly distend individual scenes until the viewer has lost even the simplest of bearings. This talent for taking a straightforward narrative and rendering it fuzzy and absurd is something Franco shares with some of the stranger denizens of the American exploitation field, although Franco is generally more self-conscious in his rogue artiness. That said, his penchant for shooting one film while prepping another and editing a third gives his skittering attention that necessary lapse into carelessness which provides a link to American eccentrics such as Renée Harmon (*Frozen Scream*) and James Bryan (*Don't Go in the Woods*).

Devil Hunter is pathologically crude, excessively weird, and filmed in Franco's zoomiest style. It has almost no coherent plot development; instead, it riffs on the bare bones of a skeletal story, drawing out scenes into pure delirium and chewing on the gristle of each image until it's easy to forget who's who and what's going on. The problem is that to really get into this murky trip through abstract lunacy you probably need to be drunk as a lord or flying high (*don't try this at home*), yet once you're wasted enough to appreciate the 90%-proof weirdness you're too fucked up to follow the remaining 10% of coherent plot. The 'story' is fairly straightforward, but it's hidden in the tropical mulch, like one of those children's picture-puzzles in which a face is concealed amid a blaze of chaotic foliage.

There are several factors aiding this slide into disorientation. Firstly, a curious doubling takes place: the film places two similar-looking blonde women in the jungle setting, although one is a kidnapper and the other is the abductee. The DVD release has gone some way to clearing things up, but if your first exposure to the film



MAIN PICTURE: The monster attacks one of the kidnappers (Muriel Montossé).
 BELOW: Kidnapped starlet Laura Crawford (Ursula Buchfellner) about to be grabbed by the monster.



was through the Cinehollywood VHS back in the 1980s, confusion will have reigned supreme. Another doubling occurs when we see two different characters, on separate occasions, suffering a frantic allergic reaction to the jungle. The first is Werner Pochath as the bad-guy kidnapper, who sobs and whines and freaks out like some drug-addled basket-case: "*What a fucking awful place! Flowers, shit! ... This wild vegetation gives me the creeps. I can't take it any longer!*" The second is Antonio Mayans' helicopter pilot, who steps gingerly into the shrubbery and then explodes into an extraordinary Vietnam-flashback routine, emoted with absurd intensity by the dubbing artist (who must surely have been taking the piss): "*Oh my poor head! I hate the jungle! And the humidity! And these shadows...*" In the delirious freefall of the film's druggy non-structure, the second of these outbursts feels like a flashback for the viewer too – didn't another character just freak out like this? You're reminded that *Devil Hunter* came out in the same year that gave us the jungle insanity of *Apocalypse Now* – if only Dennis Hopper had signed up too!

Disorientation is also fostered by the absence of certain vital connective tissue. We first see the 'heroine' (if such a bland mousy character can be thought of as such) in a long, drawn-out parallel montage. She's an actress arriving at a seafront hotel in Benidorm, giving an interview surrounded by paparazzi: intercut with her brainless twittering we see a tribal ritual on some nameless tropical island, in which a muscular black man with demonic bug eyes pounces on a bound native woman and devours her. The blonde is menaced in her hotel bathroom by stocking-masked men – and then we simply cut to them roaming through the jungle with her. Of course when you stop to think, it's obvious that Franco has simply omitted the scenes that would show how the kidnappers got their victim to the island, but there's something about the brusqueness that throws the viewer completely. It's easy enough to 'do the math' when you stop and wind it all back in the cold light of day, but when you're 'in the moment', the film swamps your mind with a powerful lysergic confusion.

So, what of the monster, the 'Devil' of the title? Essentially a statuesque black musclemán, stalking the jungle in the nude, he will stay in your mind long after the last clangorous discord has faded. Ensuring the creature a place in the pantheon of horror history are his eyes, bloody and bulging from their sockets: a striking and bizarre image of tumescence pushed into the realm of agony. No wonder the creature (man? monster?) is so enraged! Just looking seems to make him bleed. There's always something provocative about images of eyes; how could there not be, as we look at the very things that allow us to see? In cinema the image of the eye inevitably creates a sort of feedback loop of signification, while in horror cinema (the voyeuristic artform *par excellence*), the filming of traumatised or damaged eyes is an assault not only on the viewer's flinching nerves, but on the more symbolic attributes of seeing, which film theorists have discussed under the heading of 'the gaze'. And since the act of gazing is frequently linked in psychoanalytic vocabulary with the signification of the phallus, it's worth considering the way in which this goggle-eyed monster

literalises the notion of the so-called 'phallic gaze'. In the branch of film theory concerned with feminism and psychoanalysis, the voyeuristic gaze has often been discussed as phallic (at which point, theorists tend to tie themselves up in unedifying knots trying to work out how women might gaze, if not phallically). The convoluted absurdity of such debates aside, it's perhaps worth noting that in *Devil Hunter* the monster's aggressive male sexuality is never backed up by what would seem to be its logical culmination, a monstrous phallus. Instead, the protruding eyes 'stand in' as a sort of symbolic 'stunt' version. Given the film's already tasteless fetishism of tribal cultures (a feature of all cannibal films whatever their pedigree), it's perhaps a wonder that Franco hesitates to go the extra mile here by adding the persistent cultural bogeyman/fantasy of the super-endowed black man. There's the acceptability of such images to the world's censors to bear in mind, but it's a shame, in a way, that the 'black devil' in the film is lacking the one appendage that would make sense of his rambling progress through the film. (We can occasionally see the actor's penis, but as this is a non-pornographic film, it's soft.) Nude, powerfully built, and roaming the jungle with arms poised, like a musclemán showing off his dorsals, he's put forward as an image of primitive virility, and when he finally pounces on his trussed up female victims he ravishes their straining torsos before snacking on throats and intestines. There's no doubt that this 'Devil' is hell-bent on screwing as much as snacking, but the production falls short of offering this ultimate climax, leaving us with only the monster's extraordinary appearance to compensate. The impossibility of endowing *Devil Hunter*'s monstrous male with a suitable penis is therefore compensated for by his bulging tumescent eyes, offering instead a sort of 'erection of the gaze'.

Of Franco's two 'cannibal films', the first, made for Eurociné, feels like a bit of a jape with a slapdash aura and lots of silliness, whereas *Devil Hunter*, for all its absurdity and carelessness, hits a vein of delirium that links it to the better films of Franco's career. It may trail behind them like some Neanderthal beast, with a vacant stare and drool hanging from its lips, but still there's a whisper here of the magic that Franco summons to the screen in his more personal projects. *The Cannibals* feels like someone having fun at the expense of the sub-genre; *Devil Hunter* feels authentically deranged.

Music: *Devil Hunter*'s relentless weirdness is partially down to its pulverisingly freakish sound design. The music was created by Franco himself, to which indescribable freeform meanderings he adds a constant *mélée* of animal screeches, heavily echoed grunts and throat-rattling groans. It's like being mugged by an especially unfriendly segment of Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma*. The stormclouds of aural chaos part occasionally, allowing for other sources to shine, including a ruminative, melancholy haze of acoustic guitar and wordless vocal (if you like it, you'll be pleased to learn that it turns up in numerous Franco films of the 1980s). However, the sonic bombardment of space-echoed shrieks and scrapes eventually sends the mind reeling off into bitch-slapped confusion, which as much as anything will define whether or not you enjoy the film or back away

with your hands over your ears. Only one scene, in which Antonio de Cabo ravishes the chained up Ursula Buchfellner, functions without music, and the sudden prolonged silence throughout the scene endows it with a seedy intensity, proving that Franco, for all his excesses, knows how to upturn expectation and wrong-foot the viewer ... Mystery surrounds the identity of 'Carloto Perla', credited with the wordless vocals on the *Devil Hunter* soundtrack and also used uncredited in later films such as *Macumba Sexual*, *La noche de los sexos abiertos*, *La esclava blanca*, and the Spanish cut of *Oasis of the Zombies*. I used to suspect that Franco himself was responsible, but he denied it when I asked...

Locations: An architectural ruin in the gardens of the Palacio de Monserrate in Sintra, previously seen in the Dietrich era films *Voodoo Passion* and *Die Sklavinnen*, provides the kidnapper's cave hide-out. Buchfellner's arrival for her press junket is filmed in the coastal resort of Benidorm. Look out for Gisela Hahn's utterly pointless walk down the Benidorm seafront, in which Franco's hand-held camera is the only thing looking at the actress while every single passer-by stares relentlessly into the lens! (Note also two identical Mercedes saloons parked by the kerb; on the roadside in between them is a pile of camera accessories: these two cars probably belonged to the production and/or producer Julián Esteban... Al Cliver visits Benidorm's Hotel Don Pancho. According to Franco, the rocky coastal scenes were shot in Spain, just outside Alicante.

UK theatrical release: None. Released on UK video in November 1981 by CineHollywood as *Devil Hunter* (or 'The Devil Hunter' on the cover), the film became one of three Franco films dragged into the video nasty furore. It was eventually banned, along with *Bloody Moon*; a third Franco title, *Women Behind Bars*, was dropped from the list. Some Franco shockers, like *Justine* and *Barbed Wire Dolls*, escaped attention because they were transfers of heavily cut cinema 'X' prints; others like *Oasis of the Zombies*, *The Demons* or *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* ended up on the less serious 'Section 3' list, liable for confiscation but not prosecution.

Cast and crew: On the interview accompanying Severin's DVD release of the film, Franco claimed that female star Ursula Buchfellner had once been *Playboy* magazine's 'Playmate of the Year': in fact she was the October 1979 'Playmate of the Month'. She was also 'Playmate of the Month' in the December 1977 German edition of *Playboy*, when she was sixteen years old (the American edition dutifully waited until she was eighteen before ogling her pussy). Playing a hapless innocent and classic blonde 'bimbo', Buchfellner certainly looks the part, especially during the opening scenes in which she waves to imaginary crowds of wellwishers from an open-topped car and strikes sexy swimwear poses for photographers outside her seafront hotel. In terms of her performance, Franco remembers that she was a sweet and sincere girl who didn't 'try to be an actress' and happily did what was asked of her ... Franco regulars in the cast include the always entertaining Portuguese actor Antonio de Cabo (playing a sexually abusive kidnapper), and Antonio Mayans is back too, gearing up for

the long-term collaboration that would see him working on more than forty subsequent Franco films, as both actor and production manager. Al Cliver, fresh from Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesh-Eaters*, plays a character whose name, Peter Weston, echoes the character 'Peter West' played by Ian McCulloch in the Fulci film ... Also featured again is Leonardo Melo Acosta, the handsome young co-star of *Las chicas de Copacabana* (here he plays the kidnapper who meets a grisly end in an animal trap) ... Franco was not especially fond of this film but he did have fond memories of one of the cast members, as he told Marian D. Botulino in 2001: "*The best thing about it was Werner Pochath. An outstanding actor, but completely crazy. Kinski was harmless compared to him. He was constantly chaotic, rushed, on the verge of snapping.*"³ ... Angel Caballero, who would later play the male lead in *Sadomania* (1980) worked uncredited on *Devil Hunter*, as Juan Soler explained to me: "*He lived in Benidorm and had a studio where he painted posters, street posters, advertisements, etc. In El Canibal and other films of this style, he was in charge of setting up the native villages, painting the totems, decoration, props, etc.*"⁴

Other versions: Severin's Blu-ray, taken from the original Spanish negative, is the longest available version, and in terms of the material included appears definitive. Various video versions over the years (namely the UK and Dutch release called *Devil Hunter*, the French release *Chasseurs d'hommes* and the American release *The Man Hunter*) have omitted or shortened sexual and/or violent scenes, including Laura being stripped and prepared for a ceremony by natives, shots of natives dancing around Laura, the sex scene on the boat involving Muriel Montossé, and the scene of the monster entering the boat. In Severin's release, the opening credits play over two minutes of jungle footage which does not appear in any other version (the Italian version, *Il cacciatori di uomini*, runs credits on a plain red background over the first two minutes of the film while the soundtrack, complete with foley sound and dubbing, plays underneath!) The only drawback to Severin's otherwise ideal presentation is the peculiar lack of image contrast, apparently due to a flaw in the original materials. That such a low-contrast appearance is not evident in the ultra-cheap 1980s VHS versions suggests that these were struck from prints where grading had already been adjusted to compensate. A subsequent German DVD from XT Video improves the grading considerably.

Problematica: Burt Altman is often said to play 'The Monster'. This is an error: Burt Altman (real name Bertrand Altmann) is a Caucasian silver-haired French actor who appeared in *Cannibal Terror* playing a crime boss. He does not appear in *Devil Hunter* ... Just to add to the general confusion surrounding Franco's cannibal projects, there are in fact *two* Italian directors called Franco Prosperi: one made shockumentary films like *Mondo Cane* (1963), *Africa Addio* (1966) and the race-hate docudrama *Goodbye Uncle Tom* (1971); the other directed crime thrillers like *Tecnica di un omicidio* (1966) *Every Man is My Enemy* (1967) and the rape-revenge thriller *La settima donna/Last House on the Beach* (1978). Counter-intuitively, perhaps, it was the latter who was set to direct "The Cannibal".

SADOMANIA

(USA DVD title)

Spain & West Germany, 1980

dépósito legal no: M-1037-1981

French visa no: 55258

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Sadomania (El infierno de la pasión) (SP)

Sadomania – Pleasure Inferno

Sadomania – Hölle der Lust (WG) *Sadomania – Pleasure Inferno*

Alternative titles

Prisoners of the Flesh (GB theatrical)

L'Enfer du Plaisir (Canadian theatrical) *Pleasure Inferno*

Sadomania violenta (SP video)

Hellhole Women (US video)

Carcel del sexo (ARG video) *Sex Prison*

La carcel del sexo (ARG video – video-generated onscreen title)

Straffelejren Sadomania (DAN video) *Penal Camp Sadomania*

Correccional (SP depósito legal registration title)

Unconfirmed titles

Correctional 2000 (original SP title according to Filmportal – no reference in SP press sources)

Sadománia, avagy a szenvedély pokla (HUN DVD?)

Production companies

Lisa/Metro Film (Munich)

Plata Film (Madrid)

Theatrical distributors

Lider Films S.A. (Spain)

Residenz Film (West Germany)

Golden Era Film Distributors Ltd. (UK)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa October	1980
Dépósito legal number	13 January	1981
German X-cert JK478 issued	17 March	1981
Germany	19 March	1981
Cologne	19 March	1981
Cannes Film Market screening	May	1981
Spanish approval date	04 June	1981
Seville	07 August	1981
Madrid	21 August	1981
Aalst, Belgium	26 February	1982
UK 'X' cert issued	31 March	1982
Paris	26 May	1982
Cartagena	28 May	1982
Barcelona	09 August	1982

Theatrical running times

Germany 85m34s

Spain 98m

UK 60m04s (cut from 77m56s)

Video/DVD running times (converted where necessary)

US 'Blue Underground' NTSC DVD 102m30s

(as *Sadomania (El infierno de la pasión)*)

Dutch 'European Shock' PAL DVD 87m44s

(as *Sadomania*)

director: **Jess Franco**. writers: **Jess Franco**, **Gunter Ebert**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar** [miscredited to Hannes Fürbringer]. focus puller/camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. production managers: **Julio Parra**, **Antonio Mayans** [as 'José Antonio Mayans']. art director: **Rolf Albrecht**. make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. assistant make-up: **Marie-Louise Lusewitz**. editor: **Jess Franco**. assistant editor/assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Almirall']. music: **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: stills [German release]: **Hannes Fürbringer**. stills [Spanish release]: **Juan Soler Cózar**. 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Ajita Wilson** (Magda Urlato). **Andrea Guzon** [as 'Andrea Guzzon'] (Mercedes Lorenz aka 'Conita'). **Ursula Buchfellner** [as 'Ursula Fellner'] (Tara Lambert, a drugs smuggler). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Governor Mendoza). **Uta Koepke** (Olga Gordon). **Angel Caballero** (Michael Gordon, Olga's husband). **Gina Jansen** (Loba Mendoza, the Governor's wife). **Otto Retzer** (Mario, a slave trader). **Jess Franco** (Lucas, brothel-keeper). **Marie Luise Lusewitz** [as 'María Luisa Sancho'] (Uschi, Conita's blonde friend at the brothel). **Patricia Quow** (Juna, guard who fights with Conita). **Nadine Pascal** (Beba, French prisoner). **Tania Sandoval** (Miriam). **Diana Capdevila** (Female Guard #1). **Consuelo Tejera**. **María del Carmen González**. **María Encarna Tejera**. **Antonio Ros**. *Uncredited*: **Juan Soler Cózar** (friend of Michael shot during prison break-in/Mario henchman in blue shirt [two roles]).

Synopsis: *Newly-weds Olga and Michael Gordon are driving through the Spanish countryside when they inadvertently trespass on the territory of the Hacienda Blanca, a women's penitentiary run by the sleazy, impotent Governor Mendoza, his horny wife Loba, and a sadistic head wardress called Magda. Magda imprisons Olga and banishes Michael from the penitentiary. After various indignities at the hands of this brutal regime, Olga begins to despair, but Michael returns to free his beloved. In the meantime some of Olga's friends have been shipped off to a brothel where they are used by twenty men a day with all the money going to Lucas, a gay slave trader, and Mario, his procurer. Michael and Olga break into the brothel, and with the help of another prisoner, the*

feisty Mercedes, they treat Magda the wicked warden to a taste of her own medicine. She must face her last foe in the alligator-infested swamps where she has sent so many of her prisoners to die...

Production notes: In the Autumn of 1980 Franco embarked on a three picture deal with the Munich-based Lisa/Metro Film: a Women-in-Prison film (*Sadomania*), a slasher film (*Bloody Moon*) and an erotic drama about sex-trafficking (*Linda*). Also on board for two out of the three (*Sadomania* and *Linda*) was the Madrid-based company Plata Film, whose prior credits included Amando de Ossorio's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971), and León Klimovsky's *Werewolf Shadow* (1971).

Juan Soler on *Sadomania*: "I see that in the credits they put Hannes Fürbringer as Director of Photography and me as second operator. This is not true. Hannes, in the films I did with Jesús, was only a stills photographer and only for the Germans, because I was taking the stills for the Spanish producers. Director of photography was me, and in these films there was never a second operator. This is a good time to clarify the following: in Jesús's films, he himself operated the camera (except when he was in front, of course). Why? First, because he liked it, but I think the most important reason was budgetary. The vast majority of productions we made were quite cheap. Each meter of film was sacred. If I were in charge of a camera, for example, faced with any mistakes or bad movements, a shaky pan, an uncertain zoom, or actor failure, I would cut and repeat the scene. If Jess was in control of the camera and experienced any of these problems, he would let them pass, because given he was the one who edited the film, he already knew that he would cut away, add an insert, or a counter-shot, etc. Another reason was time. A feature film was shot in three weeks, perhaps less. There was no time for perfectionism, not even to light, in many cases. Much less to repeat scenes. Since I did not live in Madrid, I did not have the opportunity, for example, to go to the camera rental company and test cameras or tripods. I found everything there on the set. We always had old camera and old tripods, with no hydraulic or friction heads. The movements were often bad and Jesús trembled a lot with the camera. We had a problem with the camera on *Sadomania*. The lab (I think it was Fotofilm) warned us that some scenes had come out with strange effects, some unwanted light in the lens. In fact, the synchronisation of the shutter was not perfect. However, some sequences were shot with that 'effect', scenes inside the boat and under the dock. As it was not possible to stop the shoot, we dealt with it in the most improvised way. Ángel Ordiales and I, in a small kiosk or beach bar with our bodies half outside and the camera inside, on top of a freezer, completely dismantled an Arriflex and reassembled it. It worked."¹

Review: *Sadomania* is a whip-crackin' cousin to *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, serving up the same kind of sado-erotic scuzz with tongue-in-cheek gusto. Franco is in high spirits here, creating an absurd bon-bon that nevertheless delivers genuine shocks, especially when it comes to... Well, we'll get to that in a moment.

With a topless female chain-gang dressed only in cut-off jeans and straw sombreros, it's swiftly clear that the film has precious

little to do with reality. Instead we're bivouacked within the confines of the male sexual imagination, which makes it all the more fascinating that the star of the show is transsexual Ajita Wilson as Magda, the prison wardress from hell. Her camp performance dominates *Sadomania* and will no doubt govern whether you find the film funny, sexy, sick, or a devil's brew of all three. Picking up on the cartoonish quality Dyanne Thorne brought to *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, Wilson is in fine fettle, giving lines like "Your squirming is pure joy to me!" the lipsmacking relish they deserve. Whereas some Franco WIP-fests such as *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Women in Cellblock 9* combine black humour with a stifling aura of cruelty, *Sadomania* is a relatively bouncy affair (and yes, I'm thinking of the breasts here – they're difficult to ignore).

Despite the absurdity and omnipresent sleaze there are some classy photographic moments along the way: a fight to the death between a spirited prisoner (Andrea Guzon) and a bolshy female guard (British actress Patricia Quow), for instance, which is photographed at sundown on the crest of a hill overlooking the sea. Lighting cameraman Juan Soler gives the scene the benefit of his expertise and Franco frames the action beautifully as a duel between silhouettes. It's the sort of pictorial elegance you don't expect to see in an exploitation film, and if it's ultimately just decorative it's certainly not unwelcome. The girls are mostly decorative too: blonde and Playboy-esque, they exude a sultry servitude that will most likely stiffen the corpus cavernosums of the majority target audience, although personally I miss the more characterful faces seen in *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*; Beni Cardoso or Peggy Markoff for instance.

Franco's handling of rape and molestation is once again skimmin'ly superficial (see *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*), and we're definitely not meant to take anything seriously (the director himself once described this film as "more of a comic-strip"). Sexploitation considerations totally eclipse plausibility – for instance, Olga remains topless in the clobber she wore at the penitentiary even after she's rescued, dressed in nothing but cut-off jeans when sailing to a slave bordello to rescue a friend. The indignity of sexual servitude is barely remarked upon by the victims, one of whom even sympathises with the impotent Governor Mendoza after he fails in his effort to rape her. (Her compassion extends further to the Governor's wife Loba, who'd been hoping that the rape might arouse her husband long enough for her to get some action too!) This is obviously comedic, in a sick sort of way, but it's also indicative of a fantasy world that's beginning to turn in on itself. Wish fulfilment figures are common in the cinema, but to have a rape victim show concern for the impotence of her attacker is an extraordinary digression from reality, even for porno. It either mocks the very foundation of rape fantasy (a power-trip) by condescending with pity, or else it indicates a solipsism in which roles are governed only by the fantasist's whim at the moment of writing. The latter is more likely: on the commentary track for this film, Franco states, "I am completely amoral. I am proud not to follow the fake morality, which is based on old reasons which have no reasons to



TOP LEFT:
Lucas (Franco) and
Olga (Uta Koepke).

TOP RIGHT:
Slave trader
Mario (Otto Retzer)
rapes Conita (Andrea
Guzen).

MAIN PICTURE:
Mario tests the
merchandise

SADOMANIA
Hölle der Lust

VERLEIHE: FREISCHENZ-FILM



TOP: Michael Gordon (Angel Caballero) sets about rescuing his young wife Olga (Uta Koepke).

LEFT: At the salt lagoons of Torrevieja, Franco blocks the final scene of the film with lighting cameraman Juan Soler, while Ajita Wilson (holding script) and Andrea Guzon (back to camera) stand by.

ABOVE: Juan Soler (right) and German stills photographer Hannes Fürbringer (left) at the jetty in Mar Menor where the slave ship scenes were filmed.

persist."² And the scene that proves Franco's not merely boasting? As a therapeutic intervention to cure her husband's impotence, Mrs. Mendoza arranges for him to watch a prisoner being raped by a randy alsatian dog...

It's alright, you can put down the phone, the RSPCA need not be involved. It is of course faked, but my goodness it's enthusiastically choreographed. Better still, as far as the plot is concerned it works. Watching a girl being violated by a dog cures Mendoza of his impotence and allows him to make love to his wife. He's happy, she's happy, the dog looks happy. The victim? Less so, but you can't please everyone. Full marks go to Antonio Mayans in this scene: as he watches the bestial tableau his features contort with a mixture of fascination and pity, that extraordinary and corrupted 'pity' the sadist feels while savouring every moment of a victim's degradation.

Shocking it may be, but this outbreak of simulated bestiality is far from gratuitous. The surrender to animal urges is *Sadomania's* main theme: the knowledge that our thoughts can be controlled, defined, overridden by animal instinct is a frequent preoccupation of Franco's, and the concept is emphasised repeatedly in the dialogue in *Sadomania*: when slave trader Mario (Otto Retzer) molests a new arrival, she screams "You're a PIG!!", to which he smirkingly replies "And you're my little piglet!" Wicked warden Magda sneers at a woman whom she's imprisoned in a tiny crate, gloating "That's all you are; an animal in a cage!". Later she feeds her victims to the alligators who live in a nearby swamp. Then there's the Governor's wife, whose animal excesses are manifested by her desperate obsession to have her uterus sprayed with hubby's seed. What matters for *him* is the total degradation of women; all that matters for *her* is the frantic imperative to conceive. In both of these characters a mindless urge completely dominates their actions. Most eloquently of all, the bestiality scene is prefaced and interpolated by some creepy shots of mechanical toys, including monkeys playing musical instruments, their clockwork faces grimacing as they go through their mechanised motions. The dog-sex, with its rutting and brutality, is ironised by this material – humans and animals, locked in a paroxysm of sex, as grotesque and mechanical as wind-up dolls – with Franco twisting the key. Even the victims surrender the moral high ground in favour of a visceral satisfaction of the revenge instinct: "I know what we're doing is inhuman, but I just don't give a damn," says Conita, as she sends Magda to her death at gunpoint in the alligator-infested swamps. It's a statement the film seems to endorse, and it prevents the climax from turning into a morality tale; in a world where vengeance rules, right and wrong are less important than making sure you have the whip hand.

Franco on screen: In one of his most startling directorial cameos, Franco plays a white slave trader called Lucas who, despite being gay, specialises in selling women. Fey, cynical, unfazed by the immoral nature of his trade, he's a curious character for Franco to create, even more so for him to play. The white-trafficking subplot culminates with a jaw-dropping scene in which we see Lucas being

buggered by a moustachioed black male. Franco claims in a DVD commentary for *Sadomania* that the 'man' on top of him in this sequence was actually Ajita Wilson wearing a fake moustache. Juan Soler, however, is doubtful about this: "I did not remember the scene with the man on top of Jesús, but I'm pretty sure he was not Ajita. I suppose they could have hidden her hair and put on a moustache, but this man's face is round, whereas Ajita was thin with a long, angular face."³

Cast and crew: *Sadomania* sees Franco's first association with the actor Ajita Wilson (1950-1987), a slender, commanding black transsexual whom he also cast in *Macumba Sexual* (1981). A Brooklynite New Yorker, Wilson was reportedly born a man but chose sexual reassignment in the mid-1970s before moving to Europe, where she established herself as a woman in softcore and hardcore features. She got her start in Euro-exploitation with *La principessa nuda* (1976) directed by Cesare Canevari (of *Gestapo's Last Orgy* infamy). From there she worked for Erwin C. Dietrich (*Adolescenza morbosa*, 1978), Joe D'Amato (*Le notti porno nel mondo n° 2*, 1978) and Lucio Fulci (*Luca il contrabbandiere*, 1980) before attracting the attention of Franco. Never one to mince words, Franco had enormous respect for Wilson as a woman: speaking on the Blue Underground commentary track for *Sadomania*, he explained that the film began with the producer's request for a film vehicle tailored specifically to the actor: something in the style of the 'Ilsa' films, perhaps? Franco enthusiastically agreed, and set about concocting a movie influenced by the sexier Italian 'fumetti' comic strips, with their panting sadism and nude terrorised beauties. On working with Wilson, he said, "She was charming and we had no problems on a professional level. People very often say that transsexuals have inferiority complexes, they have problems, that they create dramas, but in her case I have to say that I have never met a transsexual with these problems. I think it was all made up by grumpy old women who are jealous of the beauty of these guys [...] I don't care whether she's a transsexual or not. The result is what counts. What I am interested in, in a film, is to see the bodies. Everybody has secrets, that's all very nice, but I don't care. She had a very beautiful body. Operated on or not [...] She was a magnificent girl. I don't mean magnificent as in 'sexy' or 'hot'. As a person, she was a girl with great class."⁴

Music: *Sadomania's* jaunty theme tune by Daniel White is heavily influenced by Dave Brubeck's famous 5/4-time classic "Take 5". White's composition dates back to the early 1960s when it was used in a radically different arrangement (for piano) in Franco's *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* (1962). Other recurring music cues include a guitar and vocal tune from *Las chicas de Copacabana*, and a laid-back piece for acoustic guitar and electric piano culled from the sessions for *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* (here used to score the scene where Mendoza tries to have sex with Tara). There's also an early outing for a haunting melody soon to be more closely associated with *Macumba Sexual*, played by Franco and Daniel White on ARP Solina and electric piano. The haunting melody that accompanies the mechanical toy on Mendoza's mantelpiece is "Underground Waltz", taken from the Daniel White library LP *Mystère Bleuté*.

Locations: Shot in the provinces of Murcia (Lo Pagan and the Mar Menor Lake) and the salt lagoons of Torrevieja.

UK theatrical release: *Sadomania* played briefly in UK sex cinemas as *Prisoners of the Flesh*, under which absurdly religious title it was submitted to the BBFC, receiving an 'X' certificate on the 31st March 1982. The film was cut from the submitted length of 77m56s to a skinny 60m4s, losing over 17m and rendering it no doubt utterly boring and unwatchable even by the miserable theatrical standards of the day. Redemption Films had their attempted video release rejected outright in 1994, and it was only in 2005 that a cut version was cleared for the UK. Anchor Bay's DVD submission was trimmed from 102m31s to 102m12s, removing a shot of a pin entering a woman's nipple, but amazingly did *not* snip the simulated bestiality!

French theatrical release: *Sadomania* opened on six screens in Paris on 26 May 1982: the Cinevog Saint-Lazare and the Beverley (two of Franco's most secure Parisian bookings), plus the Vedettes, the Ciné Nord, the Scala, and the Montmartre-Ciné. It stayed on release in Paris for three weeks before moving on, but it was periodically revived thereafter, appearing in the capital as late as February 1988.

Connections: *Sadomania* riffs once again on the 'Women-in-Prison' genre, which Franco had been peddling repeatedly since 99 *Women* in 1968 ... Magda hunts victims across a swampy lake infested with crocodiles, in scenes borrowed from *The Most Dangerous Game* (a literary source previously visited in his excellent 1973 film *Countess Perverse*) ... Organised sex trafficking first appeared in his oeuvre in *Countess Perverse* and flourished through *Die Sklavinnen*, *Girls in the Night Traffic*, *Je brûle de partout* and *Ópalo de fuego* ... Franco stated that the film was inspired by his love of fumetti (violent and erotic Italian comic-strips) ... The rape victim who expresses sympathy for her rapist echoes an even sillier and more offensive scene in 99 *Women*, in which the victim of a lesbian rape not only sympathises when her attacker tells a sob story about being turned lesbian by a butch female employer, but proceeds to cuddle up and kiss her!

Other versions: On Blue Underground's first DVD release of the film, Franco's day-for-night scenes were accidentally graded as day scenes. The company subsequently reissued the film with its correct grading. In both cases their version was drawn from an uncut Spanish print, *Sadomania* (*El infierno de la pasión*). An English-language dubbed export version, called simply *Sadomania* onscreen, was released by the Dutch 'European Shock' label. Some fifteen minutes shorter than the Blue Underground version, it also features a completely different score. Most noticeable is a spooky theme for strings and female vocals heard when Magda torments a caged woman, written by an uncredited Gerhard Heinz. The cue is used prominently in *Sadomania*'s neighbouring production *Bloody Moon*, for which Heinz composed the entire score. Evidently *Bloody Moon* and *Sadomania* were being edited at the same time and Franco simply borrowed some of Heinz's music for this alternative version.

BLOODY MOON

(UK theatrical title)

West Germany, 1980

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Die Säge Des Todes (WG theatrical) *The Saw of Death*

Alternative titles

Colegialas violadas (SP theatrical) *Violated Schoolgirls*

Lune de sang (FR theatrical) *Blood Moon*

La lune de sang (FR video)

Profonde tenebre (IT theatrical) *Deep darkness*

Orgia sangrienta (ARG or MEX theatrical)*

Sexmord på pigeskolen (DEN) *Sex Murder at the Girls' School*

Terror y muerte en la universidad (ARG video cover)

Crímenes viciosos (ARG video)

Ματωμένο Πέγγαρι (GRE video) *Blood Moon*

Unconfirmed titles

The Bloody Moon Murders (BEL video)

Production companies

Lisa/Metro Film (Munich)

Rapid Film (Munich)

Theatrical distributors

Gold International Films S.A. (Spain)

Residenz Film (West Germany)

Amanda Films Ltd. (UK)

Timeline

Shooting	circa October	1980
German 18-cert 52249 issued	23 March	1981
Germany	27 March	1981
Cannes Film Market screening	20 May	1981
Madrid	14 December	1981
Seville	18 March	1982
UK 'X' certificate issued	26 January	1982
Cartagena	12 May	1982
Aalst, Belgium	27 August	1982
London	05 November	1982
Barcelona	18 June	1984

Theatrical running time

Germany	84m23s
UK	83m27s (cut from 85m03s)

Video/DVD running times (converted where necessary)

US Severin Blu-ray	85m
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* Also the Spanish video title for Carlos Aured's *Apocalipsis Sexual*.

director: **Jess Franco** [as Jesus Franco]. executive producer: **Erich Tomek**. producer: **Wolf C. Hartwig**. screenplay: **Erich Tomek** [as 'Rayo Casablanca']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Fátima Ochando**. stills: **Hannes Fürbringer**. production managers: **Otto W. Retzer**, **Antonio Mayans**. coordinator: **Maite Mannchen**. costumes: **Rolf Albrecht**. make-up: **Lore Sottung**. special effects: **Juan Ramón Molina**. art director: **Klaus Haase**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Almirall']. editor: **Karl Aulitzky**. assistant editor: **Christine Jank**. music: **Gerhard Heinz**. song "Love in the Shadow" by **Frank Duval**. world sales: **E. Hillenbrand**. *Uncredited*: "Love in the Shadow" orchestrated and conducted by **Michel Dupont**. 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Olivia Pascal** (Angela). **Alexander Waechter** (Miguel Gonzalez). **Nadja Gerganoff** (Manuela Gonzalez). **Christoph Moosbrugger** (Alvaro, Head of the Language School). **Jasmin Losensky** (Inga). **Otto W. Retzer** (Paco, the handyman). **Ann-Beate Engelke** (Eva). **Corinna Drews** [as 'Corinna Gillwald'] (Laura). **Peter Exacoustos** (Antonio, the Countess's gardener). **María Rubio** (Countess Maria Gonzalez, Miguel's Aunt). **Antonia García** (Elvira, Alvaro's secretary). **Beatriz Sancho Nieto** (Rita). **Jess Franco** (Dr. Domingo Aundos).

Synopsis: Miguel, a disfigured young man, steals a Mickey Mouse mask at a pool-side party and tricks a young woman into inviting him into bed. When she pulls off the mask and discovers his ruse, he stabs her to death with a pair of scissors. A few years later, he's released into the care of his sister Manuela, a sultry brunette with whom (unbeknownst to his psychiatrist) Miguel has incestuous relations. Miguel and Manuela move in with another relative, the wheelchair-bound Countess Maria. The Countess has sold part of her estate to Alvaro, an ambitious young man who's recently built an international language school on the property. After a hostile exchange with Manuela, the Countess is burned to death in her bed by an unknown attacker. At the language school, a party of new arrivals, mostly beautiful girls, occupy the chalets in readiness for their Spanish lessons. Angela, who suffered a frightening encounter with Miguel on the train en route to the school, sees him lurking near her chalet, and becomes convinced he's going to kill her. But maybe she should be more afraid of the handyman who wanders the grounds with a pair of shears? Could Latin love machine Antonio be a killer? Soon Angela will know the horrible truth, but first the murderer has plans for her friends, Inga, Eva and Laura...

Production notes: Next up was *Bloody Moon*, an untypical mainstream horror outing derived from an original script by Erich Tomek, who was also the production manager on the film. Interestingly, the credits of Erich Tomek and actor Otto Retzer (the handyman in *Bloody Moon*) regularly coincide; could they perhaps be related? Juan Soler remembers the film fondly: "It's a movie we did with more production facilities. Special effects equipment and a lighting truck! I believe that with Jesus, it was the only time I worked

with Sirios (HMI). It was also the only time I had the opportunity to go to the laboratory in Munich to accompany or approve the grading and see the entire film, the first copy." ¹ A worldwide success on video, *Bloody Moon* gained notoriety in the UK when it was caught in the net during the 'video nasty' controversy...

Review: Those who dislike Jess Franco and who find his cult popularity inexplicable often claim that Franco followers have discarded objective standards of judgement. Normally I would bristle at the suggestion (or lampoon the very idea of 'objective standards') but in this case, in the name of journalistic integrity, it's my duty to warn you it's probably true – although I'm not so much blind to *Bloody Moon*'s faults as impervious to them. Repeated viewings have turned its flaws into pure joys, each as intrinsically pleasurable as a Hitchcock set-piece. So for this review my critical faculties are on vacation: in my opinion a good start to the day would involve playing the *Bloody Moon* soundtrack and swanning around the house in a dressing gown reciting choice snippets of dialogue ("I'll have nightmares if you keep telling your horror stories! You've quite a repertoire of chilling tales!"). When the world and its burdens weigh heavily, I can always watch *Bloody Moon* and escape to a world of ineffable eccentricity, sun-drenched bimbos and hideous flesh-wounds. It combines three of my favourite things in one package: it's a Jess Franco film, it's a slasher film, and it has a disco-inflected soundtrack. Could it be any more wonderful?

Unlike Franco's best films, *Bloody Moon* is, to put it mildly, unsuited to close analysis. There's no melancholia, no suspension of narrative time, no otherworldliness, and none of the philosophical amorality that proliferates in his darkest work. It's all about fun, the simple pleasures of grisly death and senseless storytelling. The film's tin ear for dialogue is a constant delight, while the goofiness of the plot takes the already tenuous motivations and absurd logistics of the slasher film and spins them into delirium. Girls are menaced by shadows which turn out to be tailor's dummies, leering nobodies try to make you believe 'they-dunnit', senseless plot twists erupt into glorious graphic violence. *Bloody Moon* elevates the silliness of Grade-Z slashers to the dizzy peaks of the absurd. Highlights include a scene in which incestuous vixen Manuela stands in the doorway of a tiny train compartment, fretting that her brother Miguel has hurled a woman bodily from the open window... until the 'victim' stands up from her seat, popping into frame from beneath, surprising not only the viewer but, incredibly, Manuela too! Then there's the girl who wipes condensation from a mirror in her bathroom and sees a threatening man reflected behind her. Instead of wheeling around in shock, she diligently wipes away a bit more condensation before gasping, "The guy from the train!" This is the sort of film in which a girl who finds the mutilated dead body of her friend can run screaming to the nearest male, only to be persuaded that it was just her overactive imagination. Meanwhile, gore fans will treasure the graphic violence: we get a scissor-murder, a knife through a breast emerging from a nipple, a decapitation by saw, a bloody throttling by metal pincers, a throat piercing, and

a chainsaw murder, all of which bloodshed is way more detailed than Franco typically offers (only 1987's *Faceless* comes close). But the more you watch the film, the more you'll appreciate moments *without* the graphic mutilation: for instance, the scene in which a class-full of headphone-wearing floozies learn rote Spanish from a recording while the teacher prowls around making lascivious eye contact, or anything involving Antonio, the class hunk. Don't get me wrong, I'm as much of a sucker for Hispanic charm as the next bimbo, but Antonio has a wonderfully oafish quality that makes his supposed sex-machine status pricelessly comical. He appears to have inherited the role of male sex object simply by being the only young guy in the vicinity. When introduced to the sceptical Angela by a friend, who twitters "*As a lover he's fantastic!*", Antonio smirkingly adds "*If you really want to know, try me out one night!*" We're queuing up, Antonio, believe me. Then there's poor, frustrated Inga, who wails "*I bet he's never even made it with a girl, the phony Spanish lover!*" after she's 'stood up' on a date. The apex of all this joyous silliness comes when Inga's mocking girlfriends peer through her bedroom window and catch her faking a 'night of passion', ripping her own blouse and bouncing alone on the bed to provide the required sound effects. Oh Inga!

The bed-bouncing scene may be the comic high watermark of the film, but there are so many great moments it's hard to choose a favourite. After all, in the annals of the slasher movie there can be few set-pieces as adorably ridiculous as the *Bloody Moon* sawmill sequence. Inga finally gets a date with a man, who promptly drives her to a disused stone-mill in the countryside. "*I still don't know what you look like, why don't you take off your mask?*" she blithers, as he ties her to a chunk of masonry. Unfortunately, we the audience *do* know what he looks like, thanks to a couple of indiscreet camera angles which reveal an unmasked tousle-haired male who looks nothing like any of the suspects! Never mind – recollection of this *faux-pas* is likely to be obliterated by what follows, as Inga, gabbling like an idiot all the while, is trussed up and decapitated by an enormous spinning masonry saw which sends her severed head tumbling to the floor and her neck spurting wildly, like a gory imitation of her gushing chatter. And still the fun's not over: the killer tops it all off by climbing into a Mercedes and mowing down a child who's been spying on the murder through a window. (The slaughter of children in horror films is *such* a rarity; Lucio Fulci made a habit of it, bless him, but few other directors would dare.)

Woven into the storyline is an incongruous thread of incest, which is probably the most authentically Francoesque element; no American slasher film would show prime suspect Miguel, a murderer and psychotic with an unfortunate facial deformity, being sexually exploited by his wicked sister. Indeed, in a murky twist typical of Franco, Miguel's incestuous desire appears positively innocent next to Manuela's teasing manipulation. It's just a shame that Lina Romay wasn't available to play a character so obviously suited to her talents, a fact which Franco seems to acknowledge by casting Nadja Gerganoff, who bears a passing resemblance to her. No one really stands out among the rest of the cast, although

Alexander Waechter does what he can with the sinister yet pitiful Miguel. Ultimately though, like any slasher film, this is hardly the place for thespians to shine. The star of the show is the script, and if you take the film to your heart there are lines here that will be etched in your memory for years. *Bloody Moon* was filmed during one of Franco's most prolific periods, so it's really a shame that he didn't make another five just like it; after all it was a financial success all over Europe. Unfortunately, it was the second-to-last Franco film to receive a cinema release in the UK.

While *Bloody Moon* lacks the personal obsessions and fluid style of Franco's best work, it's a wonderful rapprochement between the mainstream commercial trends of the day and Franco's own taste for sensationalism – a balance he would subsequently find harder to strike in the eighties, as his work slid towards to the cul-de-sac of hardcore pornography.

Franco on screen: Franco takes a minor part as Dr. Domingo Aundos, the psychiatrist who unwisely releases incestuously lovelorn Miguel into the custody of his scheming sister.

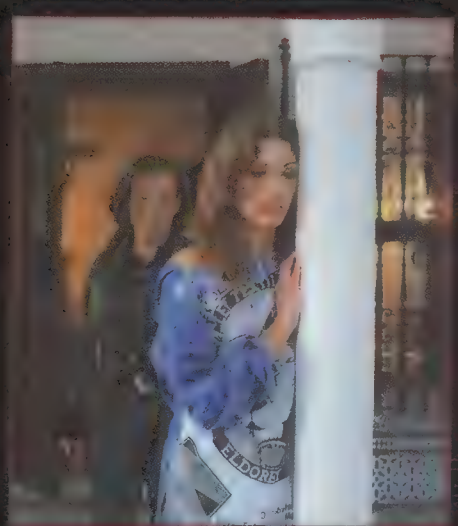
Music: Apparently Pink Floyd were initially lined up for the *Bloody Moon* soundtrack. Thank God *that* fell through. Instead we get a charming mélange of disco and Euro-pop, which works so much better than Floyd's glum early-eighties pomp-rock would have done. Presumably Roger Waters was too busy moaning about how alienating it is to play supersize stage shows to care about poor Inga and her troubled sex life... There's something irresistible about the juxtaposition of disco ambience and slasher killings, perhaps because the frivolity and optimism of disco strikes sparks against the cynicism and brutality of the stalk-and-slash genre. However, despite the opening scene using a chirpy, MOR Doolies-style disco song, it's more accurate to describe the endlessly recurring main theme as anthemic Euro-pop; I'm reminded of the work of Demis Roussos, whose warbling male soprano would mesh perfectly with Gerhard Heinz's melodies. The actual horror themes are hokey but highly effective, with all the tricks in the book thrown in; throbbing synthesiser, ominous *Jaws*-style cellos, wailing female voices, shivering violins and piercing flutes. And as the girls drag Antonio onto the dance-floor, who can forget the film's rock'n'roll number, with its chillingly infanticidal lyric: "*Shake your baby, shake-shake your baby, shake that baby, shake shake shake*"... Composer Gerhard Heinz is almost as prolific as Franco, with over a hundred film credits to his name, including a great many collaborations with sex-comedy specialist Franz Josef Gottlieb. He also provided the music for Franco's next film, *Linda*. An album called *The Erotic & Painful Obsessions of Jess Franco*, featuring his music for *Bloody Moon* and *Linda*, is available from All Score Media.

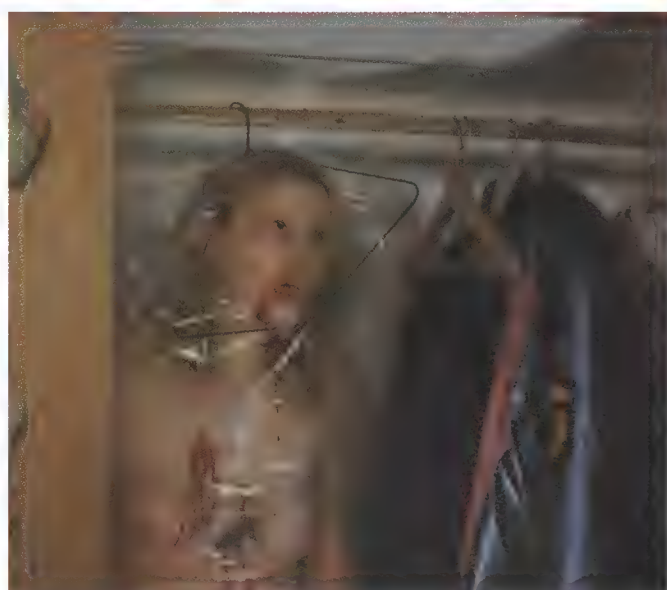
Locations: Filmed in Alicante, with the Peñón de Ifach rock formation clearly visible in several scenes. The language school was filmed at the Hotel Huerto del Cura, Alicante.

UK theatrical release: Amanda Films Ltd submitted *Bloody Moon* for UK theatrical release, and an 'X' certificate was granted on the 26th January 1982. The version they submitted ran for 85m3s, cut to 83m27s by the censor. However, this was also the heyday of



MAIN PICTURE: Miguel (Alexander Waechter). attacks his manipulative sister Manuela (Nadja Gerganoff). BOTTOM LEFT: Angela (Olivia Pascal) confronts creepy gardener Paco (Otto W. Retzer). BOTTOM RIGHT: Angela swoons into the arms of Antonio (Peter Exacoustos). The latter scene is not in the film and was presumably intended to come at the end: note the iron bars of the Countess's villa in the background, and the daylight setting.





FACING PAGE TOP ROW, L TO R: the killer creeps up on Angela (Olivia Pascal); Laura (Corinna Drews) gets the old pincer treatment; Miguel creeps up on Angela, a scene not used in the film which may have been simply a staged promotional photograph.
MAIN PICTURE: Angela discovers the grisly fate of the Countess (María Rubio).

THIS PAGE, TOP: Inga finally stops talking.
Note the alternative title suggested by this German pressbook.
BOTTOM LEFT: Miguel commits the first grisly murder in the film.
BOTTOM RIGHT: No wire hangers! Eva (Ann-Beate Engelke) turns up dead.



unregulated video in the UK; *Bloody Moon* was already available on tape, having been released in November 1981 by Inter-Light in a version longer than the BBFC sanctioned cinema cut (81m35s, which translates to approximately 84m35s on film). It would soon join *Devil Hunter* on the list of 39 officially banned 'video nasties'. However, the Inter-Light tape was still a few seconds short of the uncut running time that would eventually surface on European video releases, and ultimately on the definitive 2008 DVD release from Severin (84m55s). The remaining 8s difference between this and the version submitted to the BBFC in 1982 is probably an administrative error.

Connections: Angela's bed-time reading is Marc Olden's supernatural crime novel *Poe Must Die ...* There are similarities between *Bloody Moon* and Mario Bava's *A Bay of Blood* (1971), including multiple killers battling to obtain a slice of desirable real estate, and a rich wheelchair-bound old woman who becomes a victim of the plotters ... Italian distributors Unifilm obviously thought that they could market the film as a giallo in the Dario Argento style, retitling it *Profondo Tenebre* and thus combining Argento's classic *Profondo rosso* (1976) with his then-current hit *Tenebre* (1982) ... Note the return of the giant pincers, all the way from 1970's *Eugenie!*

LINDA

(export title)

West Germany & Spain 1980

depósito legal no: M-27.843-1981

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Die nackten Superhexen vom Rio Amore (WG)

The Naked Superwitches of the Rio Amore

Orgía de ninfómanas (SP) *The Nymphomaniacs' Orgy*

Alternative titles

Die Frauen vom Rio Amore (alt. WG) *The Women of the Rio Amore*

The Story of Linda (GB onscreen video title)

Captive Women (US video)

Linda, de stoeipoes (NL video) *Linda, the Sex Kitten*

Production companies

Lisa Film (Munich)

Rapid Film (Munich)

Plata Film (Madrid)

Theatrical distributors

Lider Films S.A. (Spain)

Residenz Film (West Germany)

Timeline

Shooting date:	February	1981
Cannes Film Market screening	20 May	1981
German X-cert JK479 issued	18 May	1981
Germany:	29 May	1981
Depósito legal number	05 August	1981
Spanish approval date:	23 September	1981
Madrid	19 October	1981
Seville	27 November	1981
Cartagena	20 May	1982
Barcelona	13 December	1982

Theatrical running times

Germany	83m26s
Spain	88m

Video/DVD running times (converted)

German 'Japan Shock' PAL DVD	84m03s
UK 'Avatar' VHS	81m31s
UK 'Avatar' PAL VHS version	79m59s

Note: The Spanish Ministry of Culture incorrectly lists the Spanish release as 26 January 1989.

"Eran entrenadas para ofrecer su cuerpo al sexo en todas sus perversiones" ["They were trained to offer their bodies to sex in all its perversions."] – Spanish admat, 1981

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Jack Griffin' in German version].

screenplay: **G.E. Derendorf**. director of photography: **Juan Soler**

Cózar [miscredited to Hannes Fürbringer]. production managers:

Erich Tomek, Antonio Mayans. editor: **Karl Aulitzky** [actually

Jess Franco]. music: **Gerhard Heinz**. German version dubbing:

Jürgen Clausen. German version recording engineers: **Otto W.**

Retzer, Antonio Mayans. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as

'Rosa Almirall']. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Raquel Evans** (Sheila Medford, manageress of the Rio

Amore). **Antonio Mayans** ['as 'Robert Foster'] (Ron Medford,

the hotel manager). **Ursula Buchfellner** (Betsy Norman).

Katja Bienert (Linda Norman, Betsy's younger sister). **Tony**

Skios (Zorro, brothel manager). **Tomás Gayo** (Juan Rodriguez,

Linda's new boyfriend). **Otto Retzer** (Miller, shaven-headed

thug). **Rafael Cayetano** (Ramon, muscular thug). **Bea Fiedler**

(Mitzy, whore at the Rio Amore). **Juan Soler** (Frankie, Mitzy's

bespectacled client). **Andrea Guzon** (Annie, whore who helps

Betsy). **Mari Carmen Segura** [as 'Maria Segura'] (torturer

in leopardskin #1). **Teodora Segura** (torturer in leopardskin

#2). **Jasmin Losensky** (Hotel receptionist). **José Miguel**

García Marfa (customer at the Rio Amore [non-speaking

role]). **Astrid Boner** (Mother Superior – footage from *Vanessa*).

Susana Cárdenas.

Synopsis: Sheila is the owner of the Transcontinental Hotel, which is run by her lover Ron Medford. She also owns a brothel called The Rio Amore, some of whose 'staff' are unwilling sex slaves abducted from the hotel. Sheila discovers Ron has been having a fling with Betsy, a hotel employee. She has Betsy framed for theft, then blackmails her into working at the brothel. Ron arranges for Betsy to escape, but Sheila's heavies intercept her on the way to the airport. She is dragged back to the Rio Amore and pressed into sexual slavery. Meanwhile, Linda, Betsy's younger sister, is on her way from convent school for a visit...

Production notes: For his next film with his German producers, Franco concocted another sex-and-violence tale with lashings of sleaziness. The film required some establishing shots on the island of Madeira, which meant a rare 'second unit' trip for Juan Soler: "Only Lina and I went, taking a camera. We did some shots on the island, including a few passes with a car like the one we had shot in Spain, a red Citroën 2CV." ¹

The film marks the beginning of Franco's association with actor and occasional production manager José Miguel García Marfa: "I started my first work with Jesús Franco on February 22, 1981 at the Hotel Cap Negret in Altea, with the film *Orgia de Ninfomanas*. I played two characters, one a supposed cabaret client and the other acting in the orgy on the catwalk of said cabaret. During this filming we caught the famous 23F coup d'état." ²

Review: Linda is a Janus-faced opus, exuding a 'sun-sea-and-frolics' vibe akin to such genial fare as *Las chicas de Copacabana*, whilst revisiting the sex-trafficking plots of *Die Sklavinnen* and *Ópalo de fuego*. Both *Ópalo* and *Sklavinnen* featured brutal scenes of torture, namely cigarettes burning women's breasts; here we see two sadistic lesbians (real life sisters Mari Carmen Segura and Teodora Segura) jabbing at Ursula Buchfellner's boobs with giant scimitar blades. I suppose to the uninitiated this will hardly sound like bubbly light-hearted fun, but we're not talking Lucio Fulci's *New York Ripper* here; Franco is neither patient enough nor angry enough to film such fx-heavy mutilations. Linda is really just a light-hearted romp in the Franco scheme of things, and its sleazy streak is more endearing than disturbing. Darker ingredients – rape, blackmail, the drugging of women to serve as prostitutes – are softened by some outrageously camp elements, none more delightful than Chilean-born sexpot Raquel Evans as Sheila, the wicked and conniving owner of the Rio Amore brothel. Evans gives a marvellously knowing performance, an unscrupulous seductress who twists men round her little finger and boasts of her kinship with the scorpions she keeps as 'pets'. Further merriment is provided by the Rio Amore floorshows, with their dry ice, human fishtanks, cane chairs, net hammocks, and women sliding provocatively around on polished glass discotheque tiles, while the script throws in lusciously silly sex talk like "I like the sweetness of your skin", "Your body's heavenly" and "I'm crazy about your legs". Mayans's line, "You're the wildest, most desirable witch in the world!" must surely be the campiest pillow talk in a Franco movie, but there are so many

quotable examples, especially at the Rio Amore where a whore asks a client, "How about something special – have you ever been round the world backwards?", a customer opens a conversation with, "Hi porcelain doll, all by yourself tonight?", and an eager-for-business hooker shouts, "I'm almost a virgin!" Mitzzy, the pushiest, most desperate whore in the club, is hilariously played by the talented Bea Fiedler: "It's nothing to look at – a routine rape!" she sneers, when a big-spending client (Juan Soler) seems distracted by illicit activities elsewhere in the club. But the star of the show remains Raquel Evans, who introduces drugged-up new arrival Betsy with a stirring cry of "I want my club to be known as the Pleasure-Dome of the world!", and isn't averse to putting on a sexy floorshow herself if she's in the mood. So perkily amoral is the film that you have to remind yourself what you're actually watching. Could this be the world's first feel-good film about sex-trafficking?

Franco is in a straightforward mood stylistically, and the tale is told with few of his trademark zooms or handheld sequences. There are no significant hallucinatory elements, and even when Betsy is drugged with a substance that induces uncontrollable desire (à la *Shining Sex*, *Blue Rita* and *Je brûle de partout*) Franco refrains from his patent brand of narcotic delirium. Yet despite this mainstream-friendly approach the script is messy, the story lacks urgency, and certain developments are inadequately explained. It's only after thirty minutes of amiable drifting that Franco remembers who the film is named after and brings Linda (Katja Bienert) into the mix. The subsequent crosscutting between Linda's innocent story of young love on vacation and Betsy's nightmare of sexual degradation at the hands of 'supervixen' Sheila provides a simple but effective dynamic. Will the lovely Linda end up like her older sister, a sex-slave at the Rio Amore? Given Bienert's age at the time, this was never going to happen, and the film therefore ends on an upbeat note. *Linda* is a good-time film that shows Franco is better off amusing us with spirited sleaze than attempting out-and-out comedy. It's the closest he ever got to capturing the upside of psychopathy.

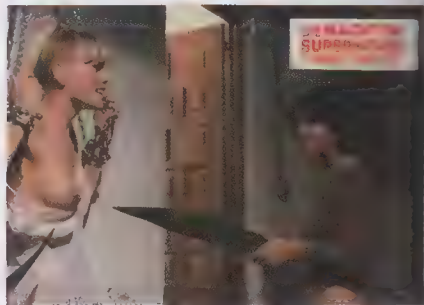
Cast and crew: Sexpot scorpion-woman Raquel Evans was chiefly associated with softcore director Enrique Guevara, appearing in four of his films: *El último pecado de la burguesia* (1978), *Una loca extravagancia sexy* (1978), *Caliente y cruel – cuento de tortura* (1978), and *Cariño mío, ¿qué me has hecho?* (1979). Unconfirmed sources claim that the Chilean-born Evans and Guevara were brother and sister (an unusual working arrangement that must have intrigued the incest-loving Franco). Austrian-born Otto Retzer, Sheila's enforcer Miller, played a slave trader in *Sadomania* and a menacing handyman in *Bloody Moon*: he worked in numerous capacities (writer/director/actor/production manager) for Lisa Film, and was production manager on *Devil Hunter*. Finally, Jasmin Losensky, everyone's favourite gabbling decapitee in *Bloody Moon*, pops up again, head intact, as an employee of the hotel ... Several cast members make their debuts in the Franco firmament. Rafael Cayetano, aka 'Ramón Rodríguez' or 'Raf Smog', is a bodybuilder whose imposing bulk and impassive features make him an ideal



MAIN PICTURE: Spanish still depicting Betsy (Ursula Buchfellner) being tortured by two lesbian twin sadists, played by real life sisters Mari Carmen Segura and Teodora Segura.

LEFT: Juan Soler enjoys himself on location with Ursula Buchfellner at the Hotel Cap Negret in Altea. As well as assisting Franco as lighting cameraman, Soler also plays a client of the Rio Amore sex club.

ABOVE: Girls writhe in tanks of aphrodisiac vapour at the Rio Amore.



MAIN PICTURE: Cigarettes stubbed out on breasts is a recurring method of torture in Franco's films, appearing in *Ópalo de fuego* and *Die Sklavinnen*. It's a classic image of torture and violence from the sleazy detective magazines of the 1960s and 1970s and probably entered Franco's consciousness through that avenue. Here, the co-producer of *Linda*, Otto Retzer, is the assailant. Ursula Buchfellner is the victim.

SIDE COLUMN, FROM TOP: Spanish poster for the film, with a prominently displayed 'S' certificate. This was Franco's favourite Spanish classification category, as it allowed plentiful sex and full nudity but no penetration. Between 1980 and 1984 he worked exclusively in this category, until changes in the law led to the merging of the 'S' category with the newly formed certificate and the refusal of advertising or mainstream cinema bookings for such films ... Younger sister Linda (Katja Bienert) and her summer beau Juan (Tomás Gayo) enjoy the sun and sun unaware of Betsy's plight ... Sheila Medford (Raquel Evans), manageress of the Rio Amore, shows the girls how it's done ... Betsy can expect no mercy from Sheila's loyal

thug in films such as *Sangre en mis zapatos*, *En busca del dragón dorado* and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*. He's also the blind beast Andros in *El siniestro doctor Orloff*, Franco's 1982 remake of *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, but his best role is the hyper-masculine nightclub bouncer who falls in love with a pre-op transsexual in *Las chicas del tanga*. Finally, it's interesting to spot José Miguel García Marfa, making his debut appearance, in a non-speaking role, as a client at the Rio Amore. García would go on to appear in sixteen films for Franco, including such diverse efforts as *Los blues de la calle Pop*, *La esclava blanca* and *Dark Mission*. An uninhibited performer, he became a familiar face in Franco's hardcore productions, appearing in eight of them, his most notable role being the eponymous peeper in 1985's *El mirón y la exhibicionista*. He was also one of the few actors to bridge the gap between Franco's hardcore titles for Fervi Films and the later, more expensive porn productions *Phollastia* and *Phalo Crest* ... The glass cages in which women are displayed at the Rio Amore were constructed by the film's male lead and Franco's indefatigable production manager, Antonio Mayans.

Music: The aura of high camp is deliciously amplified by another disco-tinged soundtrack from Gerhard Heinz, who also contributed the wonderful score to *Bloody Moon*. His cues are often reminiscent of 1970s disco group Space (aka French disco producer Didier Marouani) and bring just the right kind of sparkle (not *too* expensive) to the proceedings.

Locations: *Linda* was shot mainly in the beautiful harbour town of Camara de Lobos, a few miles west of Funchal in Madeira, with additional material filmed in Alicante: the scene in which Ron meets a prostitute from the Rio Amore who passes him a note from Betsy is shot at an abandoned resort building high on a hill overlooking the Alicante coastline. Franco has been diligent in matching the Madeiran and Spanish locations; the roads in both areas have similar castellated walls along the coastal edges. The central interior location is the Hotel Cap Negret in Altea; its main foyer, and a discoteque on the same premises, doubled as the Transcontinental Hotel and the bordello club respectively. Other scenes were filmed in Orihuela and Benidorm.

Connections: The central image of naked women confined in plexiglass tanks filled with aphrodisiac gas looks back to *The Girl from Rio* (1968). A few shots in the convent sequence are borrowed from Hubert Frank's 1977 film *Vanessa*. The scene in which the Mother Superior (Astrid Boner – yes that's her real name) appears to address Linda, warning her of the sinful dangers outside the convent, is cleverly intercut: Bienert does not appear in *Vanessa* and, apart from this scene, Boner doesn't appear in *Linda* ... The story, with its brainwashing and sex trafficking set in a brothel, echoes *Die Sklavinnen* (1975) and *Je brûle de partout* (1978).

Other versions: *Linda* was released on DVD by Japan Shock (a Dutch label) in an English language version running 78m16s. A shorter release by the 'Candybox' label runs 80m43s, but it includes scenes missing from the the Dutch release, including a beach abduction sequence, an extended torture scene, and numerous tiny additions to the dialogue.

PICK-UP GIRLS

(UK theatrical title)

Spain 1981

depósito legal no: M-10.669-1981

Original theatrical title in country of origin

La chica de las bragas transparentes (SP)

The Girl with the See-Through Panties

Alternative titles

Extasis (ARG theatrical)

El caso de las bragas transparentes (shooting title [MF])

The Case of the See-Through Panties

Lányok Átlátszó Bugyiban (HUN video)

Girls in Transparent Panties

La chica de las bragas de oro

(Murcian review: probably transcription error)

Production company

Luz Internacional Films S.A. (Madrid)

Theatrical distributors

Hispanmex Films S.A. (Spain)

Amanda Films Ltd. (UK)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa March	1981
Depósito legal number	23 March	1981
Madrid	27 July	1981
Seville	25 November	1981
Barcelona	16 August	1982
Murcia	13 September	1982

Theatrical running time

Spain	94m
UK	91m34s (cut from 95m19s)

Video running time (converted)

SP 'Video Seven' PAL VHS	95m19s
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"All your senses exploded! In an orgy of passion" – Spanish ad-line

"Fast and furious erotic action in the twilight world of vice!" – UK poster

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. editor: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall'].** production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. make-up: **Elysenda de Villanueva**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Almirall']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo

Villa'], **Jess Franco**. music recording: **Estudios Eurosonic**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. sound re-recording: **Estudios Magna Film**. dubbing director: **Carlos Romero-Marchent**. Technicolor. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Rosa Valenty** (Carla Feldman). **Lina Romay** (SP: Bijou/GB: Pussy). **Teodora Segura** [as 'Doris Regina'] (Suzy). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Al Crosby). **Albino Graziani** (Judge Charles Theodore Marcos). **Mari Carmen Segura** [as 'Mary Stein'] (Coco, Harry Feldman's mistress). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (taxi driver). **Miguel Ángel Aristu** (Emilio). **Jesús Franco** (Harry Feldman). *SP pressbook adds*: **Eva Ojeda** (Felicia).

Jess Franco edited the film himself but chose not to be credited. Bizarrely, however, he gave the 'assistant editor' credit to 'Joan Almirall', a name generally used by Franco as a pseudonym, which leads to the comic absurdity of crediting Jess as his own assistant! Instead I have condensed the two credits down to a single notation for editor. (The real Joan Almirall was Lina Romay's brother, but he was not involved in Franco's films in any way.)

Synopsis: *California*: Private eye Al Crosby is hired by a millionaire, Harry Feldman, to take his place at a meeting with Emilio, a gangster. At the rendezvous, Crosby is plied with drink and drugs by two hookers, Suzy and Bijou. They invite him back for sex, then photograph him in compromising positions. As he lies drugged and confused on the floor he is almost killed by Harry's wife Carla, who bursts in and pulls a gun on him; he's forced to flee naked and run for his life through the streets. Crosby investigates Mrs. Feldman, but when he tries to turn the tables by blackmailing her she has him beaten up by three female accomplices, forcing him to divulge Harry's whereabouts – a house in San Diego where he's holed up with his mistress, Coco. Crosby tries to warn Harry but when he arrives he finds that Harry has been shot. Crosby enlists the help of Coco, Suzy and Bijou, intending to expose Carla as the murderess. He goes to a club run by Felicia, an old flame with underworld connections, and asks her for protection. Felicia surprises him by introducing him to Carla, who decides to take Crosby into her confidence. Her story of blackmail and betrayal persuades Crosby to entrap Judge Marcus, an unscrupulous figure who's been extorting money from Carla by using an intimate secret as leverage...

Production notes: For *La chica de las bragas transparentes* (aka *Pick-Up Girls*), production money came from a new but short-lived Spanish source, Luz Internacional Films, a Madrid-based company formed in 1975 [www.einforma.com] whose previous roster included Marcello Aliprandi's *Senza buccia* (1979), a disco-inflected coming-of-age romp featuring copious teen nudity and an appearance by *Zombie Flesh-Eaters* star Olga Karlatos. Precise shooting dates for *La chica de las bragas transparentes* are difficult to ascertain, but thanks to a glimpse of the December 1980 edition of *Penthouse* we can be sure that the film was shot no earlier than the end of November 1980.

Review: This is another of those odd little pleasures tucked away in the less exposed regions of the Franco filmography. Although it's rather too slowly paced, and lacks any super-sleaze or violence, it's well worth seeing for its unusual villainess and a plot which takes a poker-faced swerve into the bizarre with the revelation of a key character's motives. Give it a chance and you'll find there are some clever twists and turns to enjoy.

The story follows Al Crosby, a private detective working for a reclusive millionaire, Harry Feldman. Played by a suave-looking Antonio Mayans, Crosby is just as sleazy as Howard Vernon's Al Pereira in Franco's 1972 film *Les Ébranlées* (the obvious model for this film) but a bit more proactive than the hapless Al Pereira played by Franco himself in *Downtown* (1975), more able to stay afloat amid the sharks he encounters. "Harry wanted a private eye with no scruples and as smart as Humphrey Bogart, so of course I thought of you," says Coco, the prostitute girlfriend of Crosby's latest client, Harry Feldman. Turns out Harry knew he was about to be shot, and intended Crosby to take the bullet. Crosby survives the hit but finds himself embroiled in the affairs of Harry's wife, Carla, and her story is as screwy as they come...

Crosby is certainly no angel – one of the first things we see him do is to drive a car woozily around the residential backstreets of Las Palmas after downing a bottle of champagne – but it turns out that Coco's cynical jibe about his lack of principles was wide of the mark. "I've got my own interpretation of scruples and conscience," he tells Carla Feldman. When she asks him to frame a man for murder, he snarls, "I never hurt anyone in my life who wasn't a real bastard!" The rest of the film hinges on Mrs. Feldman's flashback, explaining how the man she wants to frame, Judge Marcos, deserves to be included in the 'real bastard' category. However, the moral lines remain blurred: though we come to understand the full agony of Carla's situation, she remains perfectly willing to frame Suzy and Bijou, two frivolous hookers caught in the crossfire of the plot. Our sympathies may be tweaked, but on a contingent, shifting basis; as the story twists and turns the characters remain murky and ambiguous.

For instance, it's Franco's taste when it comes to private eyes that they take a beating from at least one, preferably several women, and Crosby is no exception: "Keep him in the shithouse – he'll be at home there," Carla sneers, when he's captured by her female guards. But then again, what goes around comes around: after all, Crosby admits to once beating up an old flame, Felicia, to make her divulge information. What could possibly be so important that he should need to beat up his ex-girlfriend? The answer twists the corkscrew again: she was up to her neck in illicit criminal activities and withholding information that could have prosecuted two rapists! With its shady morals, ethical dilemmas and dubious motivations, the film is a whirl of ambiguities. But when Carla Feldman describes her life so far – a catalogue of misery, deceit, exploitation and blackmail – it gives Crosby the chance to prove that he really does have a coherent set of standards, and his behaviour, though amoral by most yardsticks, is consistent from thereon.



Carla Feldman — nothing to hide?
Rosa Valenty goes full 'vamp' in
her lead role as La chica de las
bragas transparentes.

MAIN PICTURE: Emilio the gangster (Miguel Ángel Arista) and 'woman-with-a-past' Carla Feldman (Rosa Valenty).

BOTTOM ROW: Pussy (Lina Romay) and Suzy (Teodora Segura) cross paths with private detective Al Crosby (Antonio Mayans).

**LA GIGICA
DE LAS BRAGAS
TRANSPARENTES**

ROSA VALENTY-LINA ROMAY-ROBERT FOSTER
DORIS REGINA
JESS FRANCO

Director: JESS FRANCO

Se advierte al público que este película por su temática
o contenido puede hacer la sensibilidad de espectador

EXCLUSIVAMENTE MAYORES DE 18 AÑOS

ELABORAR

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Ambivalence and complexity extend all the way to the finale, in which Crosby helps Carla to eliminate arch blackmailer Judge Marcos. All that remains to spoil her revenge is Marcos's precaution of recording an account of his suspicions, to be sent to the police if he disappears. At last, you're thinking, a moral to the story: vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord. But not really. Marcos is a genuine bastard: the information he's left must surely paint him as the innocent party, so it looks as though a nefarious blackmailer will have the last laugh. Should we pity Carla? Just a little, perhaps, but then again, too bad; those who live by the sword...

There's more, but it would be a shame to explain everything here. Suffice to say that the apparently frivolous Spanish title – which translates as 'The Girl in the Transparent Knickers' – turns out to have significance, suggesting that even when everything can be seen not everything can be known. The bland English title tells us nothing at all, but don't let that put you off – this is a work of some wit, and it can leave you quietly goggling at the poker-faced wackiness of Franco's storytelling. Along the way you get plenty of fleeting amusements to add spice to the overall structure: when Crosby calls Bijou and Suzy whores, Bijou retorts, "We're practically virgins!" Crosby only survives the attempted hit by running into the street at dawn and making a dash for a nearby park, nude except for his black socks. And when he poses as a plumber to gain entrance to the apartment where Suzy and Bijou take their johns, he calls, "There's a leak in your bidet. It's flooding the whole house!"

Cast and crew: Rosa Valenty started out as a showgirl before entering the acting profession in theatre and films. Her earlier films are mostly crime thrillers, including Ramón Barco's *Todos los gritos del silencio* (1975), Fernando Merino's *El comisario G. en el caso del cabaret* (1975), and Amañdo de Ossorio's *Las alimañas* (1976). Her most noteworthy assignment is Jaime Chávarri's downbeat drama *To an Unknown God* (1977), the story of an elderly man coming to terms with his homosexuality which the American critic Vincent Canby hailed as a major work. Valenty may have been feeling unusually sympathetic towards her character in *Pick-Up Girls*: she was divorced from her real life husband in February 1981, just a few weeks before the film started shooting!

Franco on screen: Franco plays the corpse of Harry Feldman, found dead at Coco's apartment. Willing once again to join his actors in the shedding of their clothes, he plays the scene naked from the waist down... Look out for a glimpse of the cameraman reflected in a mirror at Coco's apartment, when Crosby goes to examine Feldman's body, a surprisingly rare occurrence given the haste of most Franco shoots.

Music: The music cues are familiar pieces from the Daniel White archive, previously heard in *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*, *Sadomania* and *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*. The title theme, "Atlantide Story", can be found on the 1976 Daniel White library music LP *Mystère Bleuté*. A piece heard during the poolside scene, when Pussy and Suzy catch the attention of Judge Marcos, is an alternative take of "Good-bye Glenn", a track on the Daniel J. White soundtrack LP "Mood Music Selection No. 01."

Locations: Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. Pussy and Suzy live in an apartment at the corner of the Pasaje Pescadores de la Puntilla and Calle Prudencio Morale. Pussy meets with Emilio at the Hotel Santa Catalina, seen previously in *Ópalo de fuego*. Various locations in Valencia make up the rest of the location work. The dialogue makes a half-hearted attempt to convince us that we're in California, but when Crosby hides out, Franco cuts to a road sign revealing the address as Calle La Naval! ... Juan Soler remarks, "The scene in which Mayans runs naked in the street is very funny. It was something sudden, spontaneous, without any protection or permits, in a street where any old woman who passed by could have tripped over him or been scandalised. Or not. And although I did not remember this at all, I see that I briefly appear as a taxi driver. I can imagine the moment. In the midst of shooting, Jesús realises that he needs a taxi driver, looks around and says ... Juan, get in the car, do this and say this..."

UK theatrical release: As *Pick-Up Girls*, the film was submitted to the BBFC by Amanda Films on 14 March 1983. It received an 18 certificate with cuts totalling 3m45s, and went on release in a version running 91m34s. A video release from Atlas Home Video was submitted to the BBFC on 25 June 1987, with a running time of 88m 7s. It was cut by 2m44s.

Connections: *Pick-Up Girls* is similar in some respects to Franco's 1972 film *Les Ébranlées*, which featured Howard Vernon playing Franco's perennial private eye, Al Pereira ... Coco's reference to Al Crosby being "as smart as Humphrey Bogart" dovetails with an earlier scene in which we see Crosby with his arm in a sling: Bogart was similarly handicapped in John Cromwell's 1947 film noir *Dead Reckoning* ... Juan Soler explains the film's background influences thus: "The film references American film noir, which Jesús loved. As I also liked it a lot, such a style and way of doing things flowed quite easily. We always had very little lighting, and the hotel rooms were usually too small for lights and tripods, so the contrasting chiaroscuro of film noir was ideal for us. At times, it was enough just to reinforce the lamps a little on the side tables of the room to get interesting effects." ... Franco probably modelled the film's Spanish title on *La muchacha de las bragas de oro* ("The girl in the golden panties"), directed by Vicente Aranda and released in Spain in March 1980. Like Franco's film, *La muchacha de las bragas de oro* features a character whose identity is not as it first appears; unlike the Franco film, Aranda's is a blatantly political story about the lies of a Falangist supporter of General Franco and the rise of a more liberated generation.

ADOLESCENCIA

production companies: Arturo Glez. (50%) / Midega Film (50%)
director: Jesús Franco

This appears in a 1981 Spanish production listing. No further details available.

LOLA 2000

Composite film using Franco material but not created by him

Alternative titles

Lola 2000 *Petites femmes pour hôtels particuliers*
Lola 2000 (*Une petite femme pour hotel particulier*)

Timeline

Shooting dates	1975 & 1978
Composite created	1981
France premiere	24 June 1981

Theatrical running time

France	70m
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director: Unknown [material shot by **Jess Franco** & **Alain Payet**].

Cast: **Jacques Bernard** (narrator). **Jean-Pierre Armand**. **Charlie Schreiner**. **Jean-Yves Carol**. **Rudy Lenoir**. **Richard Lemieuvre**. **Gabriel Pontello**. **Robert Leray**. **Jan Wilton**. **Lina Romay**. **Beni Toux**. **Aida Vargas**. **Martine Fléty**. **Susan Hemingway**. **Brigitte Lahaie**. **Claudine Beccarie**. **Martine Grimaud**. **Cécile Carol**. **Pamela Stanford**. **Christine Chireix**. **Marie-José Pontello**. **Sylvia Bourdon**.

Is this a Franco film? Released in French sex cinemas by Robert De Nesle's CFFP, three years after De Nesle had died, *Lola 2000* is a montage of extracts from two Franco films (*Cocktail spécial* and *Elles font tout*) and two Alain Payet films (*Furies sexuelles* and *Prostitution clandestine*). A potential source of confusion lies in the existence of a different CFFP production called *Lola 77*, which is often credited to Italian director Paolo Moffa. There is no connection, in terms of content, between *Lola 77* and *Lola 2000*.

EL LAGO DE LAS VIRGENES

(Spanish theatrical title) *Lake of the Virgins*

Spain 1981

Alternative titles

La isla de las virgenes (alt. SP theatrical)

Production companies

Tritón P.C. (Madrid)
C.G. Films aka **Cege Films S.A.** (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

C.G. Films [aka **Cege Films S.A.**] (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa summer	1981
Mentioned in Spanish press*	22 September	1981
Spanish approval date	06 October	1981
Seville (as <i>El lago de las virgenes</i>)	19 March	1982
Barcelona (as <i>El lago de las virgenes</i>)	18 June	1984
Madrid (as <i>El lago de las virgenes</i>)	20 February	1987

* As *La isla de las virgenes*.

Theatrical running time

Spain	unknown
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Video running time (converted)

SP 'Meroño Video' PAL VHS	88m22s
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director: **Jess Franco**. based on the novel "La isla" by **Robert Louis Stevenson**. adaptation by **Jess Franco**. *producer: **Joaquín Domínguez Riesgo**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales** [as 'Ángel Ordinales']. stills photography: **Juan Peña**. make-up: **Nicole Guettard**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Joan Almirall']. assistant production: **Joaquín Domínguez Jr.**. editor: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Almirall']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Madrid Films, S.A.**. titles: **Story Film – Pablo Nuñez**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited:* camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Joaquín Navarro** (Chano**). **Eduardo Fajardo** (Sebastian, Chano's grandfather). **Antonio de Cabo** (Sordo, one-eyed tavern regular). **Lola Gaos** (Vieja, a witch). **Bea Fiedler** (Rosa, barmaid/brothel madam). **Katja Bienert** (Paula). **Teodora Segura** [as 'Doris Regina'] (Flora). **Paula Matos** (Ligia). **Ángel Ordiales** (Barbas, a fisherman). **Joan Almiral** (Doctor).

*Credits say 'David Khune and Jess Franco' although David Khune is a pseudonym for Franco. **The Spanish pressbook calls Navarro's character 'Nacho'.

Synopsis: *Sebastian, an old fisherman, lives in a rundown shack near the beach with his teenage grandson Chano, and spends most of his time at a seafront bar called Mama Rosa's. One day Sebastian and Chano visit a mysterious island looking for a treasure trove that sailors tell was once buried there. Chano, who is shy and sexually inexperienced, encounters a trio of beautiful young women who flirt with him and entice him into a magic lake. He becomes besotted by one girl, Paula, in particular. When their tryst is interrupted by Sebastian, Paula runs off into the woods. The two men return home empty-handed, and Chano starts having nightmares about the girls. Sebastian takes the young man to Mama Rosa's and arranges for Rosa to take the lad's cherry. However, Chano is still obsessed with the mysterious Paula and returns to the island. Once again encountering the three girls, he's taken to a cave where an old witch tells him their story; they are all the descendants of a woman raped by*



TOP: Chano (Joaquín Navarro) on the shores of the island paradise where Paula (Katja Bienert) lives.
 BOTTOM: Chano is led further into the mysterious heart of the island by Paula and Flora (Teodora Segura).

pirates. Chano is persuaded to impregnate the three girls so that their lineage may continue. However, Rosa and her lackey, Sordo, arrive in search of the fabled treasure. The girls use magic to repel the unwelcome visitors, after which Chano returns to his grandfather. A final magic spell by the girls changes Sebastian and Chano's fortunes...

Production notes: As usual for a Franco film, the tiny budget on *El lago de las virgenes* meant that everyone had to chip in when problems arose. With no unions to worry about, and a general sense of 'all for one and one for all', the cast and crew would improvise solutions as the need arose. Some situations were more challenging than others: one particular scene called for Bea Fielder, playing greedy brothel madam Rosa, to shoot Sordo, played by Franco's friend from the Lisbon theatre, Antonio de Cabo. Coming up with non-lethal bullet-squib effects on a Jess Franco budget can be a hair-raising experience, as Juan Soler recalls: "Since there was no one doing special effects, Ángel Ordiales and I prepared a bullet cartridge to make the shot. We removed the bullet from the cartridge, we removed some powder and added flour instead. We then sealed the mouth of the cartridge with candle wax. The result was gaudy but the wax pierced the shirt of Antonio de Cabo and made a small wound, with blood and everything. The worst thing was the scare he got. Of course he never knew why it happened!"¹

Review: Though tame by Franco's usual standards, *El lago de las virgenes* is interesting because the central relationship in the film is a friendship between males, in this case between a grandfather and his grandson, the first time since *Un capitán de quince años* in 1972 that such a relationship had played a significant part in a Franco story. Both are allegedly based on a classic literary source: in the earlier film it was Jules Verne's novel *Un capitaine de quinze ans*, here it's Robert Louis Stevenson's short story "The Isle of Voices", or as the credits have it, 'The Island', although frankly the connection between *El lago de las virgenes* and the Stevenson tale is about as close as the 'link' between *Vampyros Lesbos* and its supposed model, Bram Stoker's "Dracula's Guest".

Female lead Katja Bienert once again seduces the eye with her extraordinary beauty, and fans of her 'sleepy doe' allure should note that she's topless much of the time. However, her role here is less perverse and submissive than her startling appearance in *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* – this time she's in control and the male is the quarry. The young hero is played by Joaquín Navarro, a very good-looking Latin actor who exudes youthful masculinity and a naive earnestness that makes him a fit match for Bienert. Franco, though generally disinterested in exploiting the attractiveness of his male cast, sensibly has Navarro stripped to the waist much of the time, a canny move that could have won the film more fans were it not for the antiquated story.

Despite the superficial charms of the tale, the climax is something of a let-down. When greedy bar-owner Rosa tries to flee the island with stolen treasure, we see Flora rubbing her breasts before a magical icon as if summoning dark forces to prevent the

thief's escape – only for another of the girls to resort to rather more corporeal techniques by grabbing the fleeing wench and wrestling her to the ground, which rather begs the question of why magic was used in the first place! The use of colour filters to signify the supernatural is also a little heavy-handed, but the very fact that magic is involved at all is welcome at a time when Franco was turning away from the fantastique. *El lago de las virgenes* is worth seeing if you're tempted to take a row-boat to the less visited shores of the Franco archipelago. Its ecosystem could probably withstand a few more visitors and it would make a pleasing DVD presentation one day.

Cast and crew: Anyone craving a clearer look at handsome Joaquín Navarro, given how atrociously blurry the only existing VHS of *El lago de las virgenes* is, should check out *Bragas calientes* (1983) by Julio Pérez Tabernero, in which the actor cavorts nude with a variety of women. Being a softcore escapade it's dutifully evasive about male full-frontal exposure, but nevertheless it's worth a look. *El lago de las virgenes* is greatly assisted by a warm, amusing performance from veteran Spanish actor Eduardo Fajardo as the grandfather. His impressive career took him through such marvels as *Django*, *Murder Mansion*, *Knife of Ice* and *Nightmare City*, and would include some perhaps less stellar horror diversions such as Franco's *La tumba de los muertos vivientes*. Also startlingly good is Lola Gaos, in an all-too brief role as an old witch who helpfully explains the backstory. Like Fajardo, she's a long-serving veteran of Spanish cinema (she appeared in Buñuel's *Tristana* and *Viridiana*, as well as Franco's *Residencia para espías*) and in *El lago de las virgenes* she grips the eye with her intense presence, turning a death-bed entreaty into a mesmerizing highlight.

Music: The opening credits are graced with a mournful yet bracing saxophone theme by Daniel White, a soon-to-be familiar piece used here for the first time (see the credits for *Sangre en mis zapatos*). The rest of the score is drawn from previous Franco films.

Locations: Shot mostly on the Canary Islands, although the seafront walls of Sintra, Portugal, are visible in one shot.

Connections: This is allegedly based on a novel called "The Island" by Robert Louis Stevenson, although no such novel exists. The plot is closest to Stevenson's short story "The Isle of Voices" (and definitely not *Treasure Island*, with which it has zero connection). Even then, the similarities extend to 1) a mysterious island, 2) magic spells, and 3) treasure. As a softcore sex film crossed with a romantic adventure story, *El lago de las virgenes* seems far more inspired by Randal Kleiser's smash hit teen adventure *The Blue Lagoon*, made in 1980 and released in Spain in March 1981. However, Franco's version is a little more adult, depicting the young hero having his first sexual encounter with a prostitute and including a shot of Katja Bienert's pubic hair.

Other versions: The film was initially announced to the press as *La isla de las virgenes*, and prints were indeed struck with this title. However the film was eventually released in 1982 as *El lago de las virgenes*, possibly in order to avoid being confused with the similarly titled *La isla de las virgenes ardientes* (1979, dir: Miguel Iglesias).

MACUMBA SEXUAL

[Spanish theatrical title]

Spain 1981

depósito legal no: M-42.279-1981

Unconfirmed titles

Sexual Macumba (US Library of Congress)

Sexual Voodoo (US alt. video title)

Production companies

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Felvi Films (named on depósito legal registration)

Theatrical distributor

Unknown (SMC says Columbia Films S.A. but see entry for *La noche de los sexos abiertos*)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa November	1981
Depósito legal number	12 December	1981
Seville	09 October	1982
Barcelona	20 December	1982
Madrid	20 October	1983

Theatrical running time

Spain	80m
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DVD running time

US 'Severin' NTSC DVD	80m16s
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"Sus mentes estaban dominadas por Tara, la reina bruja del placer"

'Their minds were dominated by Tara, the witch queen of pleasure' – Spanish admat

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Francisco Beringola**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'José Antonio Mayans']. make-up: **Mercedes Bayón**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Ajita Wilson** (Princess Tara Obongo). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Alice Brooks). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Mr. Brooks, Alice's husband). **Genoveva Ojeda** [as 'Lorna Green'] (Poppy, Princess Obongo's slave). **José Ferro** (Princess Obongo's male slave #1). **Jess Franco** [as 'Juan G. Cabral'] (Mehmet, Hotelier).

Synopsis: *Alice is on vacation, staying at a hotel in the Canary Islands with her novelist husband. She receives a call from her boss telling her to visit the Princess Tara Obongo, who lives on the island, in order to secure a real-estate deal. However, the Princess is the "Goddess of Unspeakable Lust" who practices black magic, and soon both Alice and her husband are drawn under her spell...*

Production notes: In the early Autumn of 1981, Franco encountered a married couple from Barcelona who were new to the film business and wanted to invest. Although they knew very little about the nuts and bolts of cinema, and had a relatively small purse for production, they offered Franco one priceless commodity: total and complete freedom to film whatever he wanted. Thus began Franco's five-year spell with Golden Films International. The husband, Emilio Larraga, put his name to the paperwork while the wife, whom Franco recalls as the brains of the operation, stayed in the shadows. Between them they released sixteen Franco films in five years: from Sadean sex dramas and minimalistic excursions into pure mood, to cheapskate children's adventures and reboots of Dr. Orloff and Al Pereira. Some of the films are almost unwatchable, others are among Franco's finest. What's clear from the whole slate is that he was able to mount any kind of production, more or less on a whim. The sillier inventions are possible only because of the Larragas' naivety; a more experienced producer would have killed some of these projects stone dead before they ever made it into production.

The first two titles, for which deposit numbers were obtained in 1981, were *Macumba Sexual* and *La noche de los sexos abiertos*, and they got things off to a very strong start. *Macumba Sexual* was a return to the subject matter of one of Franco's best films of the 1970s, *Lorna... the Exorcist*, focussing on the erotic machinations of a psychic witch, while *La noche de los sexos abiertos* was a tonally spaced-out and at times astonishingly violent crime adventure story, very loosely based on Poe's "The Gold-Bug", with private detective Al Crosby from *Pick-Up Girls* hunting for Nazi gold with the help of a sadomasochistic stripper. The Larragas were mightily impressed, as Franco explained in 1996, "*The producer [...] was excited and said, 'We have to do one or two more right away!' He was going on like that and we started shooting without stopping. Shooting and dubbing and mixing! Really like a factory.*"¹

It turned out, however, that the Larragas were ill-equipped to handle Jess Franco at his most prolific, a fact that eventually became apparent when finished titles disappeared into limbo without being released. Much to their director's puzzlement and dismay, at least nine films mooted as Golden Films productions never made it to release, and not because they were lacking anything in terms of quality or saleability. As Franco explained in 1996, "*They remained in his office. Maybe it's a matter of taxes, because he's considered a small producer and a small producer does not produce eight films, one by one by one, like that. And his idea – I suppose [because] he never told me – was to present four of them and then the next year he would present two or three more, you know?*"²

Franco also pointed to changes in Spain's film industry rules, which occurred during his time with Golden Films. Whereas Spain had previously maintained tax breaks and a quota system, demanding that a certain percentage of films shown in cinemas should be Spanish, the rules were changed when Spain joined the Common Market in 1986. After that, any EU country's films could be included in the quota. This had the unfortunate effect, Franco claimed, of slashing Spanish film production by 80% in just two years...

Review: *Macumba Sexual* begins with a montage of enigmatic imagery: sand-dunes; strange Moorish architecture; sailboats; a tall magus-like black woman silhouetted against the sky holding a naked man and woman on leashes; a bizarre sculpted object resembling a bird or a flower; a nude woman awakens screaming, as if from a bad dream; confused, she looks at her husband who has fallen asleep at the bedside table; for a second she sees the sculpture perched incongruously on his head...

So begins one of Jess Franco's finest films of the 1980s and a glorious continuation of his mission to disorientate. *Macumba Sexual's* lineage stretches back to *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Lorna... the Exorcist*, telling a dreamlike tale of a sorceress who seduces a young woman and her husband in order to pass on her supernatural powers. It stars Ajita Wilson, the noted transsexual actress who'd also recently appeared in *Sadomania*, and stands as one of Franco's most assured and mesmerising forays into pure cinema. It belongs too in the minimalist lineage of *Shining Sex* and *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*, stories that surrender narrative for a slow-motion cascade of images, the potency of which seems to spread beyond the storylines, like watercolour droplets eluding pencil marks on canvas. Everywhere in the film we encounter a sense of slippage, of the boundary between dream and reality dissolving. For instance, as Alice wakes at the end of the montage described above, it would be normal filmmaking practise to curtail the strange, avant-garde soundtrack that accompanies her dream. Instead, the droning, wailing music continues. The viewer's bearings are further destabilised by Alice's description of her dream, which includes details we have not yet seen.

The most obvious erosion of the line between dream and reality is Alice's waking vision of the sacral sculpture perched on her husband's head. Abandon definitions all ye who enter here, Franco is saying: madness and sanity, dream and reality, fact and fantasy, are collapsing into one another. What follows is a brief glimpse of the real world, long enough to see that Alice and her husband are holidaymakers – but as they swim in the hotel pool we notice that the place is eerily deserted. Alice receives a telephone message but even the hotel receptionist who passes her the phone remains unseen except for a hand entering the frame. Franco has the misfortune to catch a couple of heads bobbing past the hotel entrance, and there's a car on a distant highway in one brief shot, but the dominant feeling is that unbeknownst to Alice, normal life is already suspended: an evil spell has been cast over her.

The telephone call leads Alice to the woman in her dream, a local aristocrat called Princess Tara Obongo (more on that unfortunate surname later). She's played as a sinister vamp by the actress Ajita Wilson, whose status as a transsexual is common knowledge nowadays but was perhaps less well known at the time of the film's release. Normally it would be frivolous of me to draw attention to this, but the film deliberately incorporates Wilson's ambiguous gender into the story. After a second sadomasochistic dream about the Princess, Alice awakes and immediately tries to make love to her husband. The inference is obvious; the dream has aroused her, but she seeks to redirect that arousal into 'normal' sex with her husband. Franco, however, does not assist Alice's self-deception. The ensuing sex scene, with its undertone of desperation, is played starkly, without music, with the panting and gasping reverberated slightly to expose a neurotic quality. As things get more heated and Alice straddles her husband, Franco's sly intercutting replaces him with the Princess; Alice is left humping up and down on an implied phallus belonging to this extraordinary woman. Ajita Wilson's fingers prise Romay's ample asscheeks apart, and the sex is consummated with the (transsexual) woman in the phallic role at climax. Wilson's transsexuality also finds symbolic emphasis in the strange fetish or totem object associated with the Princess, which we sometimes see balanced on her crotch. Its design mimics a bird (head, beak and wings) and a flower (wide labial fronds and an elongated phallic stamen laden with pollen). In a key line of dialogue (which to me crosses the line into overstatement), the Princess tells Alice's husband, "*I'm everything that's forbidden, that's shameful... a black woman with an undefined sexuality... shameless and irresistible.*" Well, that clears things up then. Over-determined dialogue aside, Wilson revels in the role, with a manic glee that makes Alice's life with her husband look shallow and insipid. The 'heroine' has no guile, no depth, and as for her husband, Jess Franco is so disinterested in him that he doesn't give him a name. Whatever the manipulative, immoral nature of the Princess, she receives no condemnation from Franco. We're left simply to admire this charismatic creature, and to wonder how long it will be before her victim submits...

Alice is vulnerable to the Princess during times of altered perception; in dreams, during sex, or in daylight reveries. Her husband feels Tara's presence while writing his novel, the creative act of writing being another type of reverie. Significantly, drugs are not involved; Franco is often dismissive of drug use, even though many of his best films have a powerfully narcotic and hallucinatory ambience. For Franco, the doors of perception are open during dreams, sex, fantasy and creativity; neither drug-use, nor perhaps more surprisingly religious ecstasy, are included, even though *Macumba Sexual* allows for a sort of pantheistic supernatural world. The latter is an unfortunate oversight: imagine Alice seeking refuge in prayer, only to find the Princess smiling back at her!

Franco often stimulates self-consciousness in his audience with direct addresses to camera (*Necronomicon*; *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*; *Midnight Party*; *El sexo está loco*). In *Macumba Sexual* such awareness



is slyly tucked into its opposite, hypnotic languor, during the film's most surrealistic sequence, Alice's abstract journey to the timeless, fantasy space of the Princess. There is no voyage in the normal sense – we see Alice watching an old-fashioned sailing ship leaving harbour, and then, in the blink of an edit, she's somewhere else, as if the mere act of seeing has carried her away. She seems to voyage psychically, with the image of the boat as her guide. This sense that Alice is physically transported simply by watching a ship pulling out to sea mirrors the way we as viewers experience film itself. In the cinema, an edit is enough for us to accept a journey has taken place; two shots cut together convince us we are seeing a unified space. The 'macumba' spells of the Princess are analogous to the magic of cinema, and we embark on journeys of the mind the way Alice takes a trip through the charmed space of this magic island. Her journey is one of the most extraordinary sequences in Franco's cinema, very much reminiscent of the riverboat sequence in *Shining Sex* in that it takes a long time to unfold, 'expresses' very little, yet serves to loose the ties of logic, unmoor the mind from causal reason, and draw the viewer into a contemplative state. The music, the pacing, the straight-faced absurdity of the story, the unfamiliar architecture and the dreamlike dismissal of logic come together in a hazy, disorientating swirl, like a slow-motion sandstorm in the mind. One finds oneself watching images succeeding each other as if in a dream. And yet it's a dream that we can sit inside, and see ourselves seeing, like a lucid dreamer or a man under hypnosis knowing he is hypnotised. By making Alice's journey analogous to our experience of viewing cinema, Franco first makes the connection and then blurs even this line, between self-awareness and surrender to the image...

Many of Franco's best films seem to hover outside quotidian time and space, like mirages in a temporal desertscape. Here we see that quality linked to lost memories of Africa (the Canary Islands may belong to Spain but they're located off the north-west African coast, just sixty miles west of the Sahara). *Macumba Sexual*'s approach to the 'exoticism' of African culture emphasises mystery and seduction. The dunes, the slowness of time, the languor of music, the wide horizons and shadowless panoramas, all seem to stretch beyond the frame, to reach around the moment, extending it in our mind until we're no longer certain where we came from, what we're doing here, and how to proceed. The appearance of camels adds a bizarre visual element, though it's not as if one hasn't seen a camel before. Franco makes them *feel* bizarre, reminding us perhaps of Dali and his impossibly long-legged giraffes. Later Alice's husband also finds himself astride a camel on his way to the Princess's abode. There's something ineffably weird about the solemnity they inspire; perhaps it's the knowledge of how absurd we humans look, perched atop these stooped, gangling creatures, that causes travellers on camels to mimic the stolid, impassive expressions of the animals themselves. The surreality extends further, to a sense of the landscape as something huge and alive. As Alice runs to save her husband from the Princess, across vast billowing dunes, sliding down gulleys and climbing over slopes, it's

as if she's lost on the contours of a giant's body, running away from and running towards the same thing, a being of pure desire upon whose sands she treads, sending ripples of pleasure across its skin. *Macumba Sexual* is an almost perfect Franco film, but it has one glaring fault. When Alice's husband is seduced by the Princess, in a scene that exactly parallels the seduction of Alice, only the Princess's female slave joins in the fun – the male slave is left out, a grimacing, eye-popping voyeur peeking from behind the shrubbery. Given the Princess's claims to 'undefined sexuality' it's not unreasonable to expect the laws of symmetry to be observed here. You can tell by the way Franco cuts from the ravishment of the husband to the goggle-eyed male slave, that he knew he was chickening out. The avoidance of fully bisexual abandon is a moment of bad faith entirely out of keeping with Franco's commitment to freedom. It's a disappointment, not because audiences are necessarily desperate to see handsome Antonio Mayans fellated by the unusual-looking actor playing the slave, but because the underlying dream logic, which over-rides all other commercial considerations apart from this, is violated by what amounts to an act of repression. Shame on you, Jess Franco! Were it not for this, *Macumba Sexual* would more than compensate for the heteronormative ending of *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Macumba*'s closest sibling, by dragging the handsome hubby into the sexual whirlpool along with his lesbian-inclined wife. Other flaws are minor, although I could really do without the Princess's surname, 'Obongo', which sounds like it's been lifted from some stupid colonialist cartoon of cannibals with bones through their noses (an effect amplified in recent years by the racist use of the word 'Obongo' as a play on Barack Obama's surname).

For some viewers, *Macumba Sexual*'s slow pacing, narrative illogicality and listless, repetitive scenario will represent all that's annoying and alienating about Franco's cinema. For those who have spent time acclimatising to his style, however, it will probably assume a place near the top of any list of favourites. It was made by a man who'd been exploring his fantasies in film for twenty years, who'd stripped away the ephemera of narrative construction and needless dialogue to seek the core of his life's obsession. By placing the totem of a phallic woman at the centre of this desert of signification, he asserts female power as his major theme, while bringing to her portrait all of the skills he's accumulated creating dream environments and worlds out of time. The result is an essential work from a director at his experimental peak.

Franco on screen: Franco, playing Mehmet, a sleazy hotelier on the edge of the desert, reprises his deranged character from *Vampyros Lesbos* and his 'idiot' act from *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, complete with perverse fondling of stuffed animals. A brief dialogue exchange indicates that he's been driven crazy by an encounter with the Princess.

Cast and Crew: Speaking about Ajita Wilson, Franco said, "I don't care whether she's a transsexual or not. The result is what counts. What I am interested in, in a film, is to see the bodies. Everybody has secrets, that's all very nice, but I don't care. She had a very beautiful body. Operated on or not?"

Music: *Macumba Sexual* offers sustained exposure, unimpeded by dialogue, to one of Jess Franco's most beguiling and mysterious musical creations, an amorphous composition for grand piano, Fender Rhodes and string synthesiser. It's built around a fragment of melody which floats and refracts on waves and ripples of sound, a half-submerged memory of a tune tossed this way and that by synthesised eddies and currents. Note too the delicate half-echo of George Gershwin's "Summertime". A fragment of piano melody reoccurs, sometimes clearly, more often hesitantly or partially, haunting the film like a tip-of-the-tongue phrase eluding conscious recall. When I spoke to Franco he confirmed that this composition was his alone (the music credit for 'Pablo Villa' on his films can refer either to Daniel White, to Jess Franco, or the pair of them working together) ... In my review of *Devil Hunter* I speculated that 'Carloto Perla' may actually be Franco singing under a pseudonym, although when I asked him he denied it. In *Macumba Sexual*, he plays a hotelier who sings wordlessly to himself – and to my ears he sounds awfully like 'Carloto Perla'!

Locations: "Did you have a nice trip?" asks Princess Obongo. "A little unusual, I have to say," Alice replies. She and her husband are staying at a hotel on the Bahia Feliz, a tourist resort situated on the south coast of Gran Canaria. The unfamiliar architecture of the Princess's estate – white plaster minarets, elegant grass huts, domed cupolas and immaculate bamboo verandahs – creates an unreal atmosphere, like a fairytale fantasy of Africa filtered through C.S. Lewis or Tolkien. The harbour from which Alice takes her mystical trip to the Princess is the Puerto de las Nieves, near Agaete on the north-western side of Gran Canaria. It was seen briefly in *La noche de los sexos abiertos*, as was the interior where Alice first meets the Princess 'for real' (in the earlier film it's the house where Al Crosby and Moira hide out while decoding clues to the hidden gold).

Connections: When Alice receives a call from her boss telling her to visit a rich client to secure a real-estate deal, we're reminded of Jonathan Harker in *Dracula* ... Fishing nets hanging in and around Tara's beach abode recall similar imagery in *Vampyros Lesbos* ... Romay is reading Johannes Mario Simmel's *Double Agent – Triple Cross*, a Cold War drama written in 1965 that was made into a film in 1976 ... In an echo of Kubrick's *The Shining*, Mayans is seen working on his novel only to find he's been typing the word 'Tara' over and over again ... According to Franco, the voodoo fetish/sculpture is an authentic Senegalese object, bought at a market in Gran Canaria (the island is home to numerous Senegalese immigrants) ... Tara bestows the title of 'Princess' on Alice, which echoes the unexpected reverence extended to her character Candy by the monks in *Mansion of the Living Dead*, filmed around the same time and in the same region ... The notion that Alice is to be inducted as the 'new Princess' on the death of the current one revisits a major plot idea from *Lorna... the Exorcist*; the Princess even calls Alice "my daughter conceived by *Macumba*" while enjoying cunnilingus with her. However, the occult lineage is a bit less defined than in *Lorna*, where the witch was psychically involved in the heroine's conception.

ZOMBIES LAKE

(English-language export title/UK video)

Project abandoned by Jess Franco before shooting

France & Spain, 1981

Alternative titles

Le lac des morts vivants (FR theatrical)

El lago de los muertos vivientes (SP intended theatrical)

Zombie Lake (US video/DVD/Blu-ray)

Production companies

Eurociné (Paris)

J.E Film (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Unión Films S.A.

Timeline

France	13 May	1981
UK video release	November	1981

directors: **Jean Rollin** [as 'J. A. Lazer'] & [uncredited] **Julian de Laserna**. producer: **Marius Lesoeur**. associate producer: **Daniél Lesoeur**. director of photography: **Max Monteillet**. story: **Julián Esteban** [as 'Julius Valery']. script: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A. L. Mariaux'], adapted from an original idea by [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel J. White**. editors: **María Luisa Soriano** [SP version], **Claude Gros** [FR version]. make-up: **Christiane Sauvage**. special effects: **Michael Nizza**. underwater photographer: **Henri-Jean Alliet**. script supervisor: **Ilona Kunesova**. Eastmancolor.

Cast: **Howard Vernon** (Mayor). **Pierre Escourrou** (blond German soldier). **Antonio Mayans** (German Captain). **Nadine Pascal** (Helena's mother). **Anouchka** (Helena). **Bertrand Altmann** (Detective Moran). **Julian Atienza**. **Jean Rollin** (Detective Spitz). **Alain Petit** (bearded villager with flamethrower). **Youri Radionow** (burly pipe-smoking villager). **Gilda Arancio** (hysterical survivor of zombie attack). **Marcia Sharif**. **Yvonne Dani**. **Jean-René Bleu**. *Uncredited:* **Alain Deruelle** (Pedro, Manuela's friend). **Jean Roville** (Inspector). **Claude Sendron** (Inspector's friend). **Marius Lesoeur** (gun-toting villager).

Production notes: Franco pulled out of *Zombies Lake* just one day before shooting was due to begin, having balked at the tiny budget. French fantastique legend Jean Rollin stepped in to direct, but he always declined to include it as part of his filmography. While this absurd and soporific film has very few fans, I have to say that I really like it! Eurociné could afford to ignore the naysayers too: *Zombies Lake* proved to be one of their biggest earners.

LA NOCHE DE LOS SEXOS ABIERTOS

(Spanish theatrical title) *The Night of Open Sexes*

Spain, 1981

depósito legal no: M-42.280-1981

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Cinedrac S.A. (Spain)

(SMC erroneously says Columbia Films S.A.)

Timeline

Shooting date	Late Autumn	1981
Depósito legal number	12 December	1981
Barcelona	06 December	1982
Seville	05 February	1983
Madrid	23 February	1983
Cartagena	30 January	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain 94m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'King Home Video' PAL VHS 88m22s

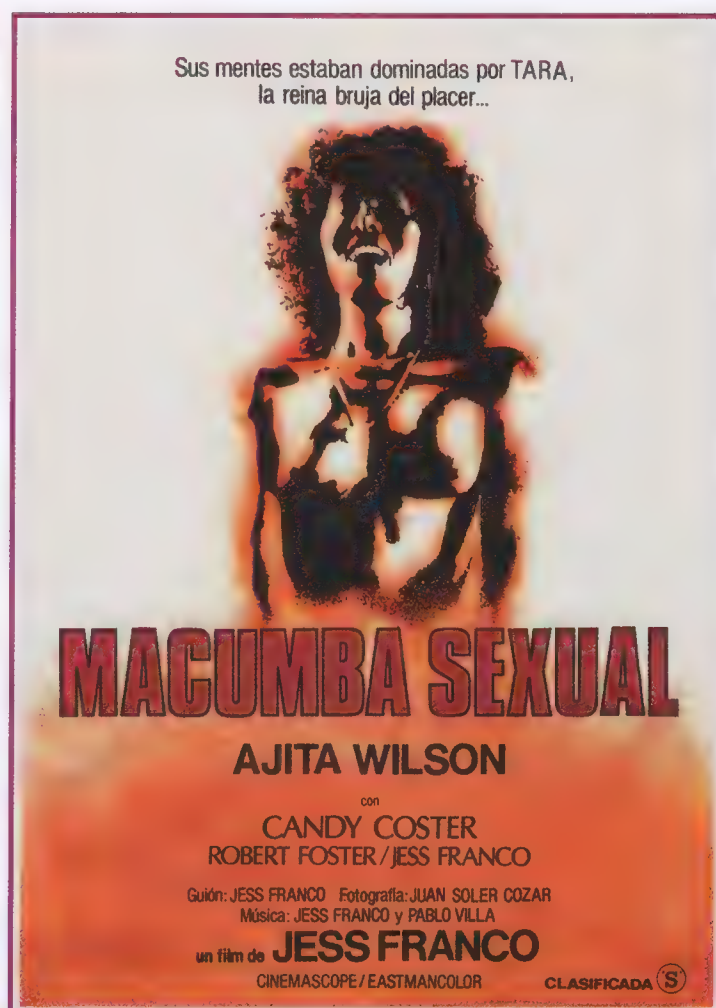
writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: unknown [miscredited as **Ángel Ordiales**]. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'José Antonio Mayans']. make-up: **Manolita Mercader**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. song "Dame tu amor" by **Carloto Perla**, performed by the composer. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Moir). **Antonio Mayans** (Al Crosby). **Nadine Pascal** [as 'Carla Simons'] (blonde villainess). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (blonde's male partner). **Miguel Ángel Aristu** [as 'Miguel Aristu'] (Vicas, Moira's lover). **Genoveva Ojeda/Eva Palmer** [as 'Lorna Green'] (Tina Klaus, curly-haired torture victim). **Albino Graziani** (General Von Klaus). **Jess Franco** (Count Miñon, man bound and gagged by Crosby).

Synopsis: *Moir, a stripper at the Mandala Club, is hired by a criminal, Carlo, to help extract information from, and then impersonate, a female secret agent, in order to intercept a message from a man called 'The General'. The information leads to the hidden lair of Von Klaus,*

a German officer in the Second World War who went missing with an immense fortune. Meanwhile, private detective Al Crosby has been following Moira and abducts her with a view to finding the fortune himself. After he rapes her, Moira decides she likes Crosby and the two begin an affair. After shooting The General and stabbing Carlo, Crosby continues to search for Von Klaus with Moira's help, whilst being tracked by Tony, a criminal whose girlfriend also works at the Mandala. Moira is abducted by the couple, and is about to be tortured for information when Crosby intervenes and rescues her. As they gather more clues and information, Crosby and Moira must piece together fragments of a poem that reveals the whereabouts of Von Klaus's treasure...

Review: Put *La noche de los sexos abiertos* on the psychiatrist's couch and you'd have to say it manifests acute schizophrenia, a condition signalled immediately as the credit sequence jumps back and forth between a melancholy coastal drive at dusk and an exuberant strip-tease show. The music over the driving scenes is an exquisitely sombre rumination for acoustic guitar and wordless vocals, with electric organ hovering discreetly in the background. The theme for the strip show, on the other hand, is the jaunty yet oddly affecting signature melody from *Las chicas de Copacabana* – giddy celebration tinged with 'what will be, will be' fatalism. What transpires only adds to the sense of a schizoid film operating on several wildly incompatible emotional levels. It can be seen as a belated twin to 1979's *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*, another hydra-headed creation in which frivolity and darkness play footsie under the table of a superficially conventional plot, while keeping a straight enough face to puzzle the casual viewer. One can see on the basis of films like this why Pedro Almodóvar likes Jess Franco – the emotional discords are compellingly ironic and very much in keeping with Almodóvar's sensibility during the mid-1980s. Unlike most Franco crime stories, the conjuring of mood is as important as the tale itself. Is it then purely by accident that the unseen driver in the credit sequence (Al Crosby?) cruises back and forth along the seafront; first one way, then the other? Carloto Perla's morose and ruminative music matches the unfocused, directionless vibe of the action, as if the driver cares little where he's going, steering without purpose along a deep blue sunset coastline. Intercut with his wandering is Moira's sex show atop a 1950s American sedan. A screech of brakes on the soundtrack, and two quick zooms – one into the car headlights and the other into a spinning neon light – bring Moira to a sort of climax as she mimics a car accident victim sprawled over the windscreen. Very J.G. Ballard, because a car crash is as good a way as any to symbolise the oncoming relationship between Moira and Crosby... Romay's cavorting on the bonnet of a classic American automobile gives a hint of film-noir pastiche, but don't get too comfortable; there's no safe genre cradle for this sick little baby. Tucked away in the obscure backwaters of Franco's filmography, *La noche de los sexos abiertos* is, for me, the best of his crime stories, capturing some of the dazed oddness of his erotic horror films. It can also claim Franco's most sadistic and shocking scene of sexual violence.



ABOVE: Posters for the first two films that Jess Franco made for Golden Films International, in the Autumn of 1981. We can surmise that Jess Franco was proud of Macumba Sexual in particular by the fact that he allowed the poster design to name him four times!

LEFT: As part of her sexy cabaret act, Moira (Lina Romay) licks pages from hardcore porno magazines, a witty joke about the absurdities of censorship in the 'S' certificate crime shocker La noche de los sexos abiertos.

We've scarcely even met Moira and Carlo before they enter a woman's home, pin her down, and torture her vagina with heated curling tongs. The close-ups leave nothing to the imagination: wisps of smoke rising from the actress's abused labia make this one of the nastiest, most pathological horror scenes Franco ever shot. And let's not forget that it occurs only sixteen minutes into a film that has so far included ten minutes of sexy striptease and four minutes of night-time driving! Franco is playing hardball with us, outraging our senses and refusing a context that might soften the blow. First of all Moira is a jaunty, spirited sex worker; the next thing we know, she's torturing another woman's vagina with a heated hair appliance. Not to be deterred, Franco then elects her as his central character! Is that the end of Franco's whiplash plotting? Not a chance. The scene in which Moira visits the home of 'The General' (Gran Canaria native Albino Graziani) has the ominous musical accompaniment that we would associate more with horror, and since it comes hot on the heels of the vaginal torture scene one is still sufficiently unnerved to expect another such occurrence. Casual killing takes the place of torture, as it transpires, but even this adds to the strangeness of the story: we have no one to hold onto as an avatar of decency or fairness: we're in the company of murderers, torturers and cynical opportunists; even 'The General' turns out to be a prick, dropping a casually racist remark about his brother having a daughter with "that disgusting mulatto" thus ensuring that we care less when private eye Al Crosby turns up later and pops a bullet in his cranium. Crosby is hot on Moira's trail, and when she refuses to answer his questions he jams a peach into her mouth and rapes her. You want more moral whiplash? She *likes* it. The next scene has the two of them canoodling on a moonlit verandah; from rape to romance in thirty seconds.

It's Franco's capricious amorality that's astounding here, as much as what's actually shown. As in *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, sexual brutality is the prelude to emotional connection: Moira finds Crosby exciting and soon the two are inseparable, investigating the central mystery like Nancy Drew teaming up with one of the Hardy Boys: just a pair of regular heroes. A subsequent scene in which they make passionate love is played for bizarre comedy, with a Buddy Rich cacophony of drums on the soundtrack, Romy acting the fool yelling "Oh! Tarzan!" and Mayans's ass protruding comically from between her clenched thighs. Once again we're watching an entirely different movie. On the home stretch the film morphs into a race for hidden gold, with our 'heroes' pursued by an equally unscrupulous criminal couple, played by Antonio Rebollo and Nadine Pascal, but this competitive angle is then thrown away in a staggeringly insouciant finale. Although they hold the whip hand, with the two lovers helpless at gunpoint, the couple steal only half the gold and leave Moira and Crosby the other half, simply because Moira asks them not to be so greedy! It's a startling defilement of the 'race against time' plot structure, and a comedy moustache drawn on the face of the crime thriller format. It may even be an expression of Franco's occasionally espoused communist leanings: don't be greedy,

because then everybody wins. For all of these reasons, *La noche de los sexos abiertos* is a quintessential Franco film of the period, and is long overdue on digital format.

Franco on screen: Franco plays a wealthy householder, trussed up and gagged by Al Crosby and Moira.

Music: Carloto Perla's vocals, sung over a supremely sad acoustic guitar theme, begin the film in a melancholic key. The composition is called "Dame tu amor" ('Give me your love') and, like some of the music recorded by André Benichou for Franco in the 1970s, it's reminiscent of the Portuguese 'Fado' genre, a musical form characterised by mournful melodies and suffused with a sense of resignation and loss. Franz Liszt's "Liebesträume" is the musical key to the whereabouts of the Nazi gold; Franco's taste for Liszt had previously found expression in *Sinfonía erótica*, which uses "Concerto No.2 for Piano and Orchestra" prominently throughout. Although "Liebestäume" isn't actually incorporated into any of Daniel White's scores for Franco, it's not entirely fanciful to hear an echo of Liszt in his most famous composition, the romantic and haunting theme for *La comtesse noire* ... As well as performing her cabaret number to the theme from *Las chicas de Copacabana*, Moira gyrates to "The Taste of Your Sperm", the manic pop-funk number from *Cocktail spécial*, and *Macumba Sexual*'s mysterious theme for electric piano and Arp Solina makes another appearance too.

Locations: This is probably the most 'lavish' of the Golden Films productions, with numerous outdoor locations shot in the Canary Islands and Spain. Most striking is El Dedo de Dios ("God's Finger"), an unusual rock structure located near Puerto de las Nieves in the northern region of Gran Canaria. Sadly, the finger, one of the most ancient parts of the island at around fourteen million years old, was damaged in November 2005 when the top broke off and fell into the sea during a heavy storm ... The secret lair of Von Klaus is represented by the fantastical interior staircases of the Muralla Roja, part of La Manzanera, in Calpe, near Alicante, first seen in *La comtesse perverse* ... The Mandala Indian restaurant, also part of La Manzanera, provides frontage for the strip club where Moira works ... It should be noted that, as so often in Franco's cheaper films, the strip scenes are not performed in a nightclub at all; they're filmed separately in a hotel room, alone with the performer, and then intercut with footage of a nightclub audience ... The same audience footage reoccurs time and again in the early 1980s films, suggesting that Franco kept reels of it expressly for re-use in later films. According to the credits of one of these later films, *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, the club scenes were shot at a Torremolinos nightclub called Piper's, which from 1967 until its closure in 2003 was one of the leading nightspots in the whole of Andalucía. Similar footage appears in *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista*, featuring many of the same people.

Connections: Private eye Al Crosby, played by Antonio Mayans as a less sympathetic Al Pereira, returns for a second outing following his first appearance in Franco's *Pick-Up Girls* ... The storyline is very loosely based on Poe's "The Gold-Bug", with Crosby trying to break a secret code to find hidden treasure.

OASIS OF THE ZOMBIES

Eurociné export title)

Version 1: France 1981

Version 2: Spain 1982

French visa no: 55295

Original theatrical titles in countries of origin

Version 1: L'abime des morts-vivants (FR)

Abyss of the Living Dead

Version 2: La tumba de los muertos vivientes (SP)

Tomb of the Living Dead

Alternative titles

The Oasis of the Living Dead

(onscreen title from pre-release export trailer)

Bloodsucking Nazi Zombies (US video/DVD)

A tumba dos mortos vivos (POR video)

Oase der Zombies (GER DVD)

O Oásis dos zumbis (BRA DVD)

Oásis dos zumbis (POR DVD)

L'abime des morts vivants (FR poster)

Las tumbas de los muertos vivientes (SP poster)

Le trésor des morts vivants (shooting title)

Unconfirmed titles

El desierto de los zombies (SP) *The Desert of the Zombies*

Grave of the Living Dead [sic] (Library of Congress)

Der Abgrund der lebenden Toten (GER)

Abyss of the Living Dead

Production company (v1)

Eurociné (Paris)

Production companies (v2)

Marte Films Internacional (Madrid)

Diasa P.C. (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor (v1)

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributor (v2)

Arturo Marcos Tejedor (Madrid)

Timeline

Shooting date (v1)	circa December	1981
Shooting date (v2)	circa November	1982
Visa number issued	24 March	1982
France (unconfirmed)	21 April	1982
Seville	05 August	1983
Barcelona	14 November	1983

Theatrical running time

France

unknown

Spain

87m

Video and Blu-ray running times (converted where necessary): Oasis

UK 'Filmland' PAL VHS version

81m36s

US 'Redemption' NTSC Blu-ray

85m32s

Video running time (converted): Tumba

SP 'Divisa' DVD

87m58s

Spanish Ministry of Culture lists the first Spanish release as 1 March 1983, but I can find no record of this in press sources.

Credits (Oasis of the Zombies): director: **Jess Franco** [as 'A.M. Frank']. screenplay: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.L. Mariaux']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar** [wrongly credited to Max Monteillet]. production manager: **Daniel Lesoeur**. assistant director: **Daniel Jouanisson**. continuity: **Iлона Kunesova**. chief editor: **Claude Gros**. sound: **Claude Panier**. music: **Daniel White**. production secretary: **Sylvie Perrot**. special effects: **Richard Green**. laboratory: **Eclair**. *Uncredited:* producer: **Marius Lesoeur**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast (Oasis of the Zombies): **Manuel Gélín** (Robert Blabert). **France Lomay** [as 'France Jordan'] (Erika Zaniken, the professor's daughter). **Henri Lambert** [as 'Henry Lambert'] (Kurt). **Javier Maiza** [as Jeff Montgomery] (Captain Blabert). **Myriam Landson** (Ingrid, Kurt's wife). **Eric Viellard** [as 'Eric Saint-Just'] (Ronald, Robert's friend). **Caroline Audret** (Sylvia, Robert's girl friend). *Uncredited:* **Antonio Mayans** (The Sheik). **Miguel Ángel Aristu** [as 'Jeff Montgomery'] (Ben/Ahmed, Robert's Arab friend). **Albino Graziani** (Professor Konrad Zaniken). **Teodora Segura** [as 'Doris Regina'] (Aisha, the Sheik's daughter). **Juan Soler Cózar** (Francis, the cameraman). **Ángel Ordiales** (John, the sound man). French poster adds: **Christian Dragaud**.

Credits (La tumba de los muertos vivientes): director **Jess Franco** [as Jesús Franco]. story: **Ramón Llido**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. assistant camera: **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. make-up: **Manuela Garcia Fraile**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music recording: **Eurosonic**. editor: **Jess Franco**. assistant editor: **Lina Romay**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *Uncredited:* producers: **Miguel Tudela** (for Marte Films) & **Jaun Couret** (for Diasa, P.C.). camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast (La tumba de los muertos vivientes): **Manuel Gélín** (Robert Blabert). **Eduardo Fajardo** (Colonel Kurt Meitzell). **Lina**

Romay (Kurt's wife). **Antonio Mayans** (Sheik Mohamed Al-Kafir). **Javier Maiza** (Captain Blabert). **Albino Graziani** (Professor Konrad Deniken). **Miguel Ángel Aristu** [as 'Miguel Aristu'] (Ahmed, friend of Robert's). **Teodora Segura** [as 'Doris Regina'] (Aisha, the Sheik's daughter). *Uncredited:* **Eric Viellard** (Ronald, Robert's friend). **Caroline Audret** (Sylvia, Robert's girl friend). **France Lomay** (Erika Deniken, the professor's daughter). **Juan Soler Cózar** (Francis, the cameraman). **Ángel Ordiales** (John, the sound man). **Daniel Katz** (Dan, Kurt's sidekick on oasis expedition). *Alt. Spanish poster adds:* Muriel Catala. José Marco. (*Note:* Catala is not in the film.)

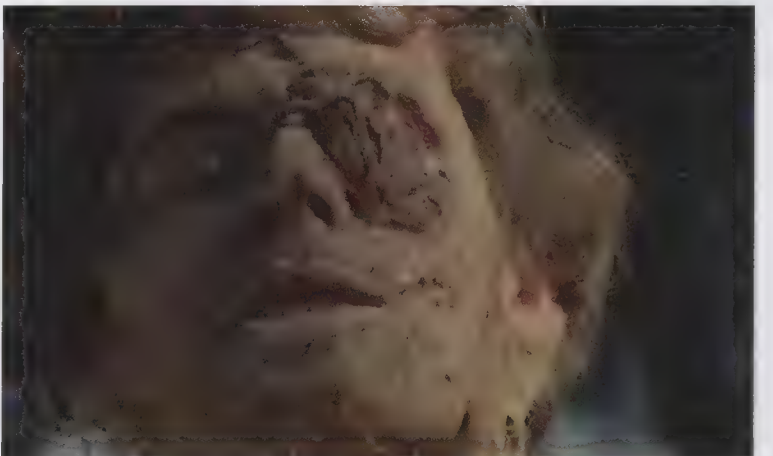
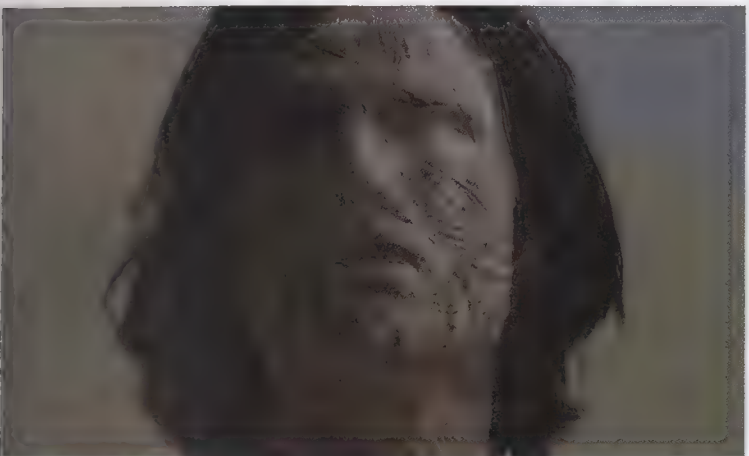
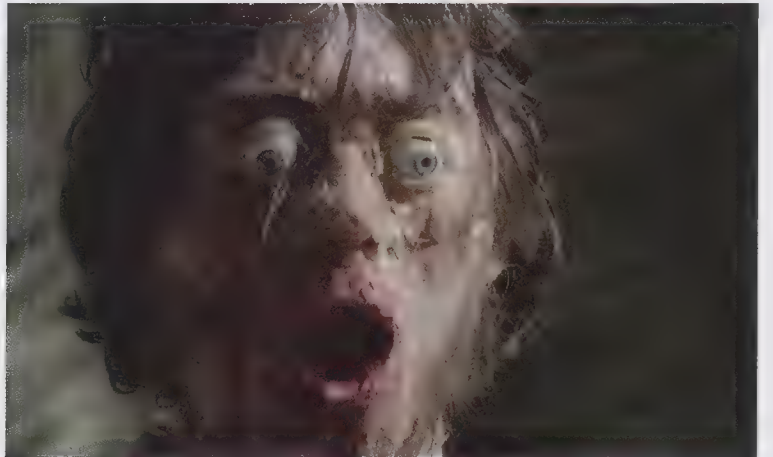
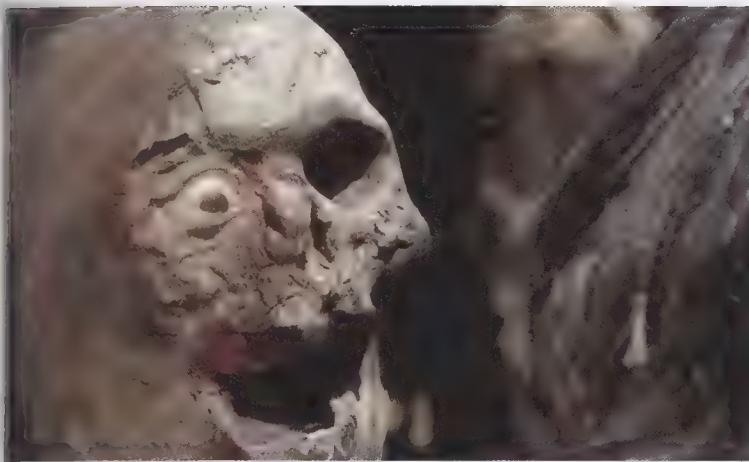
Synopsis: *World War 2. A Nazi convoy in the Libyan desert is ambushed by British forces. In the ensuing battle, all are killed except one British soldier, Captain Blabert. He is rescued by a passing sheik from a nearby settlement, and nursed back to health. Blabert falls in love with the sheik's daughter, and they make love. Blabert returns to the front for another two years, promising to return. After the war he goes back for Aisha but finds the settlement empty except for the sheik, heartbroken and alone, who tells him that Aisha died giving birth to Blabert's son ... Years later, Blabert returns to Libya, having heard that a consignment of Nazi gold was left behind at the oasis where the ambush took place. In his search for the treasure Blabert expects to ally himself with Kurt, an ex-Nazi, but Kurt wants to keep the gold for himself: he kills Blabert with poison, steals his map, and heads out to the oasis with his wife Ingrid and two Libyan guides. Blabert's son Robert, now grown up and attending college in London, learns of his father's death, and the hidden treasure. He decides to go to Africa with his American friends Ronald and Sylvia, and his Arabic friend Ben, in search of the gold. Meanwhile, Kurt and his party have already found the oasis. Before they can move the treasure, they are set upon and devoured by a gang of grossly decomposed zombies; Nazis who were killed at the oasis during the war. Kurt's two guides are killed by the zombies. After being bitten, Kurt makes his escape in the landrover, leaving his wife to be eaten by the creatures ... Meanwhile, Robert and his friends have arrived in a town at the edge of the desert. They hook up with four adventurers they meet in the town square: John, a movie cameraman, Francis, a sound recordist, Professor Zaniken, and his daughter Erica. Zaniken is called to the aid of Kurt, who is holed up at a house on the edge of town. Robert and his friends tag along. When they arrive they find Kurt sick and crazy with pain: he dies before Robert can question him about the oasis. Realising that Kurt had been in contact with the living dead, the locals burn his corpse. Ronald and Erica slip away for a swim and some canoodling, but return when Zaniken declares he is leaving. The two groups then split up. Professor Zaniken drives away with his daughter and film crew, while Robert and his three friends go to visit Robert's grandfather (the sheik who saved Blabert). The sheik confirms the story Robert's father told, and gives Robert directions to the oasis. When Robert and his friends arrive at the oasis they find Professor Zaniken's landrover already there. Nearby they find John and Francis dead, and a wounded Erica unconscious. Professor Zaniken staggers up to the teenagers and raves incoherently about zombies. Erica regains consciousness and agrees to stay to help Robert search for the treasure.*

Ronald and Erica go to Ronald's tent and make love. During the night the Nazi zombies emerge from the sand and converge once again on the oasis. After a night-long fight for survival, only Robert and Sylvia emerge victorious...

Production notes: Having recently tried his hand at cannibal movies (*Devil Hunter*, *The Cannibals*) and slasher films (*Bloody Moon*), it was inevitable that Franco would eventually be drawn to that most enduringly popular of horror sub-genres, the zombie flick. Once again, Eurociné provided the impetus, pressing him to bash out a film in a currently popular style, in this case aiming to join the flesh-eating bandwagon that followed in the wake of George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesh-Eaters* (1979). Eurociné had already scored a financial success, by their standards at least, with *Zombies Lake* (1981), directed by Jean Rollin after Franco dropped out. For very little outlay, the film made a considerable amount of money at the box office across Europe, inspiring Eurociné's Marius Lesoeur to capitalise on the zombie trend again. First he asked Rollin to shoot zombie inserts for Franco's independently produced fever dream *A Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1971), which Eurociné now owned. The new material was designed to bring Franco's allusive and poetic film into line with the early eighties post-Romero zombie craze, although Rollin's disinclination to take the assignment seriously meant that the inserts looked corny and ridiculous rather than horrific. Undeterred, Eurociné then pressured Franco to make a new film in the same vein: *Oasis of the Zombies*.

Review: One of Franco's most widely seen films, thanks to its long-standing presence on video and DVD, *Oasis of the Zombies* is also one of his least accomplished, a bottom-scraping entry in the early 1980s zombie craze residing somewhere between Joe D'Amato's *Le notti erotiche dei morti viventi* (1980) and Joel M. Reed's *Night of the Zombies* (1981).

If the aim of this book is to turn more people on to Jess Franco, I cannot in good faith say anything to ameliorate the poor quality of this movie. On the other hand, if I'm addressing the converted then it's fair to say that *Oasis of the Zombies* is capable of stirring affectionate feelings and bemused enjoyment. For those who were first seduced by European horror as it dominated the video racks in the early 1980s, there's something absurdly endearing about *Oasis of the Zombies*, from its high wandering-around quotient (with camels, even) to its comical sense of being located just over the next sand-dune from the real zombie action. Spanish horror achieved greatness twice in the zombie film cycle, with *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972) and *The Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue* (1974), both of which are gloriously atmospheric and entertaining. Unfortunately, Franco cannot be said to have reached the same level. *Oasis* labours under multiple handicaps: it's terribly slow, there's not enough violence, and as a piece of storytelling it struggles to convey its inconsequential plot. The sad fact is that Franco simply didn't care about this project, and it shows.





TOP: Franco behind the camera for *Oasis of the Zombies*. Juan Soler is to his left, Ángel Ordiales crouches to the right. Far left is producer Marius Lesoeur. The long haired man far right plays one of the zombies and can be seen as an extra in the market scenes. He was probably a local 'fixer' for the Canary Islands production.

BOTTOM: Ronald (Eric Viellard) takes a break from Nazi corpse burning to get friendly with new acquaintance Erika (France Lomay) in this beautifully lit 'magic hour' shot.

It's tempting just to rattle off a list of ridiculous moments: the attempt to zoom in on a piece of swastika-emblazoned artillery where the camerawork is so jittery it resembles footage shot under fire in a genuine war zone; the way the zombies emit sounds like a calypso percussion shaker; the same distinctively shuttered building used for two different locations; a man about to die of zombie-inflicted wounds who painstakingly staggers around until he finds the pile of straw upon which his unconvincing dummy will be burnt in the next scene, like a dying chicken fluttering around a kitchen only to drop dead in a strategically placed oven dish. The film's biggest boo-boo, however, is in the storytelling: Captain Blabert's teenage son Robert is at college in the 'present day' (the early 1980s), although he's supposed to have been born during the Second World War! Even allowing for the possibility that he's supposed to be a 'mature student', the character would be thirty-eight years old, and the actor Manuel Gélin was only twenty-three at the time. This is a major blunder, especially given an already garbled timeline that requires far too much attention for such meagre dramatic rewards.

The film kicks off with a pair of random hot-panted honeys on an exotic pleasure jaunt at the titular oasis, who are bloodlessly killed by the undead. Next we see Captain Blabert's ill-fated meeting with Kurt, a greedy ex-Nazi. The two men discuss their plan to search for Nazi gold hidden at the oasis, after which Kurt kills Blabert and steals his treasure map. Cut to location footage of Big Ben, introducing Blabert's son Robert, a student studying in London. He receives word that his father is dead, which is the cue for a sixteen minute flashback, via an explanatory letter from father to son, describing Blabert's World War 2 experiences: an ambush at an oasis conveyed by footage from another film (see 'Connections'), Blabert's rescue by a local sheik, his recovery at the Arab settlement, his falling in love with the sheik's daughter Aisha, and his return after the war to find that Aisha had died giving birth to his son. Things become especially confusing in the second half of the film, when Robert and his pals head for the desert to look for the Nazi gold. Who is Professor Zaniken, the academic they meet at a small Arab town in Libya? His party are given no reason for being in the area: they appear to be filming a documentary, although we never find out what it's about. When Robert and his friends go to visit the sheik, Zaniken's party head straight for the oasis, despite having only heard it mentioned once by Robert, with no discussion of the buried treasure. Quite a leap of deduction! When Robert and his party arrive a few hours later they find Zaniken's landrover abandoned. Zaniken is crazed, roaming the oasis talking about zombies, and his two filmmaking friends are dead. Ronald, who has managed to squeeze in a fast-track romance with Erica Zaniken during their limited time together, finds his new girlfriend lying unconscious, her face marked with fresh wounds. She regains consciousness, but instead of insisting that she and her father leave after their presumably terrifying experience, she placidly joins in with Robert's treasure hunt. And if you're expecting her to turn into a zombie, forget it, because neither Erica nor the Professor show

any lasting ill effects from being nibbled by the undead: Franco appears not to have absorbed this aspect of post-Romero zombie lore. None of the characters react plausibly to their situation, which is perhaps not surprising given how lacking in detail their motivations are. Zaniken's film crew have been killed, but Robert and his friends show little or no concern for the deaths of these two men, with whom they were laughing and joking just a few hours earlier. Similarly, you might expect Robert to be disgruntled that Professor Zaniken has hot-footed it to the oasis, presumably on the lookout for the treasure, but he never brings it up. Essentially, the dialogue lacks the basic connective tissue that would knit the various plot strands together, a function, I suspect, of Franco's overall disinterest in the project. A little more thought given to the characters and their motivations could have shored up these logical gaps inexpensively with just a few lines of dialogue.

One department in which the film does deliver is its range of goggle-eyed zombies. Some of the creatures are similar to those seen in Andrea Bianchi's *Burial Ground* (1981) and Marino Girolami's *Zombie Holocaust* (1980), while others have a strange, fibrous, sand-blasted quality all their own, and in deference to Lucio Fulci's zombies it's good to see a few worms squirming around in the facial mulch. The zombies should have popped up ten times more often, but at least the last few minutes pay off, with a sustained zombie attack on the teenagers. Major flesh wounds may be out of the question, requiring more time and money than Franco could afford to spend, but at least the requisite screaming, running, and dying takes place. Franco even creates a few shots of zombies silhouetted along the horizon of the dunes which are so lovely you wish he could have achieved the same pictorial beauty throughout. On the downside, one of the zombies falls victim to Franco's extreme disregard for plausible illusion. A particularly raddled zombie face, seen in numerous cutaway shots, is not a prosthesis at all; instead it's a just a sculpture, hoisted on the end of a stick and poked into shot from beneath! The fact that we can see the stick where it joins the underside of the skull can't even be explained away as incorrect matting: it remains visible in the widescreen version from Redemption (see 78m44s).

In the early 1980s, Italian director Lucio Fulci was King of the Zombies, and his quadrilogy of walking dead tales (*Zombie Flesh-Eaters*, *City of the Living Dead*, *The Beyond* and *House by the Cemetery*) still attracts adoring fans today. *Oasis of the Zombies*, let's be honest, is unlikely to achieve the same popularity. Franco's disdain for gore and Eurociné's meagre budgeting mean that the film lacks the violent impact required to excite most horror fans. A commitment to frequent, explicit gore would have given *Oasis* much greater credibility, at a time when shockers like Umberto Lenzi's daft but vastly entertaining *Nightmare City* or Bruno Mattei's dopey but gloopy *Zombie Creeping Flesh* were raking in the cash worldwide. What *Oasis* needs is quite simple: more zombies, more flesh-eating, more gory deaths. Add the magic ingredients, and although the flaws would still be there they'd be a lot easier to forgive: a simple commercial logic to which Franco seems maddeningly oblivious.

Following on from his similarly unenthusiastic cannibal films, *Oasis of the Zombies* is another example of Franco cutting himself off from a lucrative source of box-office revenue while stubbornly refusing to vacate the subgenre. However, as cheap and shoddy and careless as *Oasis of the Zombies* undoubtedly is, there's still something loveable about it. It's complete trash, but it's still *some* kind of fun, almost despite the director's impatience.

Franco, however, always disliked the film, indeed the subgenre itself, and scorned the 'father' of the modern zombie film, George Romero: "I don't like George Romero, I tell you frankly. I think he's too primitive. I think he doesn't enter into the heart of the story. He stays around it. In principle I must tell you something: I don't like the living dead at all, because they're silly, the living dead. They're dead, so they are silly."¹ As silly as vampires, perhaps? One suspects that it's the absence of a sex life that makes zombies unappealing to this most carnally fixated of auteurs! As for those odd remarks about Romero staying 'outside' of his subject and not 'entering into the heart of the story', they sound to me like a defensive reaction against Romero's insistence on social context. In films like *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, Romero reveals character in the wider context of social interaction. Indeed for Romero, the heart of his stories is precisely the social sphere: not the private psychopathology of his characters, and not the director's own sexual fantasy world. This points to a profound philosophical difference between the two directors, and for my money there's room in heaven and earth for both – but to call Romero "primitive" is foolish at best. One could counter that Franco's solipsistic world of sexual fantasy is more primitive, inasmuch as it denies social reality and remains at the level of infantile self-gratification. I hesitate to accuse Franco of projection in these remarks, but he's seriously off the mark here: on the contrary, Romero was an extremely sophisticated and thoughtful director whose engagement with his subject matter could not be less 'primitive', nor for that matter was it as 'cold' or 'uncommitted' as Franco seems to imply.

Cast and crew: Henri Lambert, a minor stalwart of French cinema whose bit-part career in the 1970s led him to Eurociné (*Viol, la grande peur, Convoi de filles*) gives a spirited performance as greedy, cowardly Kurt, especially when he's succumbing to the zombie infection ... *Oasis* isn't a film that many actors would include on their CV, but it didn't jinx the career of young Manuel Gélín, who plays Robert: he went on to a busy career in French film and TV which continues to this day. Likewise Eric Viellard, who plays handsome young Ronald in the film; he starred in Eric Rohmer's *L'ami de mon amie* (1987) and remains a familiar face on French TV ... For the Spanish version, Lina Romay dubs one of the girls at the oasis in the opening scene.

Music: *Oasis of the Zombies* uses a mixture of Daniel White library tracks and some newer recordings which the composer made specially for Franco. As the film begins we hear "Arabian Desert" from *Mood Music Selection No. 01 Cocktail* (a rare Daniel White library record on the Magnodis Music label), after which the credits roll over "Reflets d'Afrique du Nord" from White's album

Musique pour... (1970). Later we see the young travellers exploring a Moroccan souk to the strains of "Reflets Du Moyen-Orient" from White's *Musique pour... journal parlé et télévisé* (1969). Kurt's demise and the burning of his corpse are scored with another track from *Mood Music Selection No. 01 Cocktail*, an extraordinary din called "Apocalypse No". During the rest of the film, however, a shapeless improvisation for murmuring organ predominates; unfortunately it's so murky and vague it risks sending the viewer to sleep. In *La tumba de los muertos vivientes*, we're treated instead to a selection of music from *Macumba Sexual* and *Devil Hunter*.

Locations: Gran Canaria. The setting for the Sheik's opulent residence, which can also be seen briefly in *Ópalo de fuego*, is Christopher Columbus House at Calle Colon 1, in Las Palmas. It has long been a museum dedicated to the famous explorer, who was reputed to have stayed there en route to the Caribbean.

UK theatrical release: None. *Oasis of the Zombies* was released on UK video by Filmland and was one of four titles by Franco to be included on the Director of Public Prosecutions' 'Section 3' list of 93 films, although ultimately it was not one of the final list of 39 'video nasties' banned in the UK.

Connections: Like *The Cannibals*, *Oasis of the Zombies* is thin gruel compared to the grisly and confrontational Italian films which inspired it. Certainly when it comes to the horror of death and decay, Franco's threadbare film is no match for the surreal shockers of Lucio Fulci. Even the zombie films of Marino Girolami (*Zombie Holocaust*), Bruno Mattei (*Zombie Creeping Flesh*) and Andrea Bianchi (*Burial Ground*) outclass this tatty and unconvincing effort ... Blabert's wartime scenes are spliced in from Alfredo Rizzo's *I giardini del diavolo* (1971), in which three escaped prisoners persuade an Allied desert patrol in North Africa to follow them in their quest for the tomb of a wealthy pharaoh, which they hope to find using a stolen treasure map. As well as providing numerous shots of machine-gun toting soldiers fighting at a desert oasis, Rizzo's film also seems to have inspired the storyline of *Oasis of the Zombies*, notably the treasure map and the suggested alliance between a Nazi and an Allied Captain. It's highly likely that the expensive-looking Rizzo footage, which Eurociné had acquired for archival use, actually determined the plot and oasis setting of Franco's movie: a case of the stock footage wagging the dog ... *Doctor Who* trivia hounds will be startled, at 70m16s on the Redemption Blu-ray, by a sound effect from the Doctor's brief visit to Metebelis Three in "The Green Death" (1973) ... The name 'Erica Von Zaniken' is an obvious pun on Erich Von Däniken, whose many books claiming that man was born of extraterrestrial ancestors were a staple of airport paperback racks in the 1970s and 1980s ... Nazi zombies had something of a surge in popularity in the early 1980s, with *Zombies Lake*, *Oasis of the Zombies*, and the American Joel M. Reed's *Night of the Zombies* all turning up in 1981. The impetus appears to have been Ken Wiederhorn's creepily effective *Shock Waves* (1977), which starred Peter Cushing as an ex-Nazi commander who during the war was put in charge of the 'Death Corps', a group of zombified soldiers designed to

survive underwater. At the end of the war he sank the ship on which the zombies were kept, but the creatures continue 'living' under the sea, occasionally emerging to terrorise people on a nearby island. This 'underwater Nazi' motif heavily influenced Eurociné's *Zombies Lake* (1981), in which undead Nazi corpses emerge from the water in scenes clearly inspired by Wiederhorn's film. The Nazis in *Zombies Lake* are strangely soulful and introspective, and in the treatment of its Nazi ghouls *Oasis* also seems, if not sympathetic, then oddly casual. They return from the dead to protect a cache of looted treasure, and the victims are those who would steal it from the oasis where the soldiers made their last stand. Their ex-commanding officer (shades of Peter Cushing in *Shock Waves*) returns many years later to try and steal the loot, but pays with his life when his former underlings turn on him. As for the son of the British captain who comes looking for the treasure, the Nazis rise from their graves to see off this student marauder, who must leave empty-handed. It's almost as if we're meant to find the Nazis sympathetic, as they prevent this upstart grave-robber from stealing 'their' treasure! Yet given that 'Nazi gold' tended to be stolen from Jewish victims, it's hard to get stirred up about the noble zombie cause ... In the Spanish version of *Oasis*, the locals who burn Kurt's corpse tell Robert's party that the oasis is the home of a 'Death Squadron' which attacks anyone who comes near – a clear reference to the 'Death Corps' in *Shock Waves* ... Marius Lesoeur, who was twenty-nine when the Germans invaded France in World War 2, evidently had a morbid fascination for the Nazi period, as can be seen from the plethora of Eurociné productions dealing with it: *Train spécial pour SS* (1977), *Elsa Fräulein SS* (1977), *Helga, la louve de Stilberg* (1978), *Convoi de filles* (1978), *Les gardiennes du pénitencier* (1979) and *Commando Mengele* (1987). He would tempt Franco back to the topic in the late 1980s with *Fall of the Eagles* (1989), a wartime drama about a power struggle in a rich German family.

Other versions: There are two distinct versions of the film: the original French release, *L'abîme des morts-vivants* ('Abyss of the Living Dead'), from which the English-language *Oasis of the Zombies* is obtained, and a substantially different Spanish-language version called *La tumba de los muertos vivientes* ('Tomb of the Living Dead'). So how did this come about? Some time after *L'abîme* was completed, Franco and Eurociné secured a deal with Marta Films in Spain to release a version for the Spanish market. In order to benefit from tax credit arrangements, certain scenes were re-shot with Spanish actors in place of the French. Eduardo Fajardo replaced Henri Lambert and Lina Romay replaced Myriam Landson, which meant a remount of numerous scenes, including the characters' introduction in the first reel, and the deaths of Kurt, his wife and their two sidekicks in the middle of the film. Franco then edited the newly shot sequences into the original, and re-scored the film entirely to create *La tumba de los muertos vivientes*. Javier Maiza, who plays Blabert in both versions, is the only actor who needed to shoot his scenes twice, which was no problem as the actor lived on the island of Gran Canaria, where filming took

place. Also resident on Gran Canaria was Albino Graziani, who plays Professor Zaniken. Franco used shots of Graziani to suture the newly filmed death of Kurt into the original footage: notice that Graziani is the only other actor to appear in the frame with Eduardo Fajardo during his death scene. Franco used some skilful cutting and editing of reaction shots to hide the fact that the rest of the cast were not present. Some critics have argued that Franco shot the Spanish version at the same time as the French version. However, it seems to me more likely that reshoots for *Tumba* were conducted a year later in 1982, during the filming of *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*, which was made in Gran Canaria on some of the same locations as *Oasis of the Zombies* and which also starred Maiza and Graziani (Graziani even wears the same hat, and the same short-sleeved sun jacket). Details such as the changing colour of Blabert's moustache (brown in the French version, dyed grey in the Spanish), and the fact that he's wearing different trousers, help to establish that the two versions were not shot at the same time. (The grey moustache is an attempt by Franco, on his second pass at the material, to make the passage of time between the wartime flashbacks and modern-day scenes more plausible.) Likewise, the treasure map over which Blabert and Kurt argue is different: it's a real map in the French version and a bogus sheet of paper in the Spanish, which strongly suggests that the new scenes were filmed during a different production period. (The production evidently had no difficulty gaining access to the locations again: the scene in which Kurt visits Blabert's mansion uses the same interior in both French and Spanish versions.)

With the introduction of the teenage cast the two films fall into synch for a while, although the Spanish version has a lot more voice-over narration, for instance during a sequence in which Blabert's son reads his father's notes over shots of the desert mission, or during Blabert's desert wanderings before being rescued by Sheik Al-Kafir. The two versions part company again once Kurt and his treasure-hunters arrive at the oasis. The Spanish version has the party run adrift in the sand, whereas the French version cuts straight to the oasis. As with the colour of Blabert's moustache, Franco uses the Spanish version to correct some of the absurdities of the French cut. In *L'abîme des morts-vivants*, Kurt and his men arrive at the oasis and immediately 'bed down for the night' in broad daylight, whereas in the Spanish cut Franco adds a day-for-night filter in post-production. Among the supporting roles recast for *Tumba* were Kurt's treasure-hunting sidekicks, one of whom is played by Daniel Katz, an actor who began working regularly for Franco at the end of 1982 with *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* and *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*: his presence here is another detail which indicates that the Spanish reshoot happened at least a year later than the French original. Not all of the changes work in the Spanish film's favour: the encounter between the teenage cast and the deranged Kurt is more dramatic and effective in the original French version, as Lambert's performance is more convincing than Fajardo's, and the zombie attack on Lina Romay in *Tumba* is less grisly than the attack on Landson in *L'abîme*, which

involved a handful of butcher's offal being pulled from the woman's torso. Romay does have her breasts gnawed in one shot, and her bloody corpse is shown afterwards, though it must be said that someone has simply squeezed a tubeful of red paint over Romay's breasts (beat that, Tom Savini). The zombies themselves are much the same in both versions, except for a couple of extra ones seen in long shot in the Spanish reshoots to help sell the change of lead cast. Various close-ups are also reshuffled to make the cut work.

At some point after the original location shoot, a studio session had taken place in Paris to add extra material. Three scenes were extended: the death of Kurt's wife Ingrid, the love scene between Erica and Ronald, and the zombie attack on Erica. In the first of these, it's clear that the insert features a different actress: comparison with the other additional scenes reveals that France Lomay (who played Erica) stood in for Myriam Landson in the shots of two zombies pulling out Ingrid's internal organs. Lomay's face is kept out of shot, but the leather boots Lomay wears in these shots are the same ones she wears later for 'Erica's' love scene with Ronald! The love scene between Ronald and Erica, which takes place in a tent, is relatively mild for Franco; topless shots only, with Viellard's body mostly hiding Lomay's. Finally, when Erica is attacked by zombies at the oasis, a studio insert shows her being bitten on her bare arms and thighs (never wear hot-pants when zombies are around). Continuity is fairly well matched between the location scenes and the inserts, with France Lomay's costume almost exactly the same. The only slight error is the belt she wears in her cut-off jeans – plain white in the location footage, striped in the inserts. As for the ground beneath her, it's simply a canvas sheet sprinkled with sand! The Spanish version dispenses with all of these insert sequences, except for a brief shot from the beginning of the love scene, with the actors embracing fully clothed. The Spanish producers presumably wanted a horror film with no sex that would be playable for young audiences (fourteen and over). Why did Franco remove all of these Paris-shot inserts? Perhaps they simply presented themselves as easy to remove, given that they were added later anyway? Or maybe Franco disliked them because he hadn't shot them himself? It's entirely possible that these brief 'sex and gore' inserts had been filmed by someone else, at Marius Lesoeur's insistence, in which case Franco probably took great pleasure in snipping them out again!

As the teenagers fight the zombies with fire during the final confrontation, one boy shouts "*Molotov cocktails – like at college!*" Is this another attempt to sort out the original film's absurd chronology? The words bring to mind the French student riots and campus violence of 1968, not the early 1980s, so perhaps Franco was trying to suggest that the story is taking place in the late 1960s? If so this would make Robert Blabert (born, if you recall, in 1943, during World War 2) a plausible twenty-three during the 'present-day' action. Of course the fashions are early 1980s, and there are no other pointers to the 1960s in the dialogue or mise-en-scène, but the reference to student protests does at least indicate that Franco was trying to correct a problem that genuinely niggled him.

CONFESIONES ÍNTIMAS DE UNA EXHIBICIONISTA

(Spanish theatrical title)

Intimate Confessions of an Exhibitionist

Spain 1981

depósito legal no: M-10.339-1982

Alternative titles

Confidencias íntimas de una exhibicionista

(admat title in ABC Seville)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Laurenfilm, S.A.

Timeline

Shooting date	December	1981
Depósito legal number	25 March	1982
Seville	01 April	1983
Madrid	06 June	1983
Barcelona	27 June	1983
Cartagena	06 February	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain 80m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'King Home Video' PAL VHS 84m43s

writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Candy Coster']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. make-up: **Manolita Ponte** [as 'M. Ponte']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga & Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Candy aka 'Velvet Tongue'). **Nadine Pascal** [as 'Carla Simons'] (Pepi, Candy's sister). **José Ferro** (Pepi's husband, 'The Argentinian'). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Peter Keens, Candy's ex-husband). **Elisa Vela** [as 'Jasmina Bell'] (Katy). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (Tony, Katy's husband). *Uncredited*: **Juan Antonio García** (Candy's sex show partner).

Synopsis: *Candy performs a strip show at a small Spanish nightclub; as she gyrates, she thinks back over her life. She recalls becoming sexually*

excited during her teenage years, when she saw her sister Pepi making love with her husband. More recently, she has suffered from depression after falling in love with her therapist, Peter, who turned out to be gay. While standing on a stone parapet, intending to jump onto the rocky shore below, she meets a sultry brunette called Katy, who intervenes to prevent her taking her life. Candy finds happiness for a while as her lover. When Katy's husband Tony finds out about the liaison, he takes it in his stride, admitting that he'd always wanted to see his wife make love with another woman. The three of them make love together. One day Katy suggests to Candy that she should join her in her nightclub sex show. Candy agrees, and the two of them are quite a hit together. Always looking for more pleasure, Candy suggests hooking up with her sister and brother-in-law. She draws them into her sex shows, including an S&M spectacle in which she tortures Katy and 'The Argentinian' before seducing the former and killing the latter. However, it turns out that Katy is depressed, feeling left out of Candy's affections and crowded by the others. She commits suicide. Candy is inconsolable and tries to revive her using the only power she knows...

Production notes: Straddling the end of 1981 and the beginning of 1982 are three films for which Depósito numbers were obtained simultaneously: *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista*, *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, and *El siniestro doctor Orloff*. It's fair to assume they were shot together, and the presence of Christmas tinsel in the first two stories suggests a December-January schedule.

Review: *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* is a slight, wispy affair with a gently downbeat atmosphere, about a woman's search for love in a depopulated seaside resort. It begins as a fairly straightforward softcore sex film, with lots of close-ups of Romay's vagina as she lounges around fingering herself and telling us about her habit of spying on her sister's lovemaking. Yet despite the initial mundanity it's not long before that mesmeric Franco atmosphere, his secret ingredient, emerges like a subtle vapour from the proceedings. Our narrator, Candy, is a self-destructive lost soul, spreading herself wide open for men and especially women, yet never really receiving the love that she needs. Even when she finds affection she relinquishes it again, concentrating on sex until romantic yearnings dissipate. Halfway through, sadness almost swallows the film as Candy considers suicide, standing on a high wall overlooking the rocky coastline. Her saviour, a passer-by called Katy (played by sultry beauty Elisa Vela aka 'Jasmina Bell'), has an open relationship with equally sexy hubby Tony (Antonio Rebollo aka 'Tony Skios'), so the couple take poor Candy into their lives for a healing ménage à trois. However, a jarring melodramatic twist reminiscent of the Gothic romances parodied by the Marquis De Sade's *Justine* triggers a last minute lurch into darkness. Candy returns from shopping one day to find her vivacious new friend has committed suicide. Totally distraught, she strips off her clothes and frantically mounts Katy's corpse, rubbing her pussy against the dead body in an effort to revive her friend. It's a remarkable scene, depicting an act of necrophilia born of grief and loneliness

rather than the desire for total control over a lifeless object. I found it genuinely moving, more akin to *Last Tango in Paris* than a cheap throwaway sex flick. Finally, as if recoiling from the darkness, the film ends on a curious Brechtian gesture: the entire cast (all six of them) line up nude and take a bow to the camera, intercut with Candy's nightclub audience applauding. (Once again, as in *La noche de los sexos abiertos* and *Shining Sex*, Franco intercuts a scene clearly filmed in a hotel room with another scene shot in a nightclub and asks us to believe that the two spaces are contiguous!)

The weakness of this film is its lack of detail. The narrative is so underdeveloped that when the time comes for a dramatic climax there isn't enough material to make it stand up. Katy's depression and suicide come hurtling out of nowhere; we've seen nothing to suggest that she's unstable, in fact quite the opposite. Her suicide happens immediately after the S&M stage show, in which she was bound to a St. Andrew's Cross and mock-tortured by Candy, but there's no indication of a causal link. Neither the acting nor the dialogue point to it, so we're left floundering for explanations. The film gives every sign of having been shot with a minimal script, mostly improvised for the camera, and then assembled into a rough chronology with the voice-over added later to smooth over the cracks. This is given away when a shot of Candy's knickers on the washing line on Katy's balcony inspires a clunkingly literal monologue about the panties waving like flags of surrender: while the metaphor itself is amusing, the placement has the hallmark of an afterthought, something which popped into Franco's mind as the film was being dubbed. Elsewhere we see lips moving without dialogue, which suggests that Franco simply forgot what the actors were saying at that point, and decided not to bother writing new dialogue. My guess is that he simply lost interest in this film before completion. Like the contents of an artist's notepad, where some drawings are rendered in detail while others float half-finished in a sea of blank paper, Franco's films vary both in thematic density and directorial care. His manic speed can serve the subject, bringing it to life with crude vitality, or it can leave a film beached and gasping on the sands of authorial disinterest. In *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* there's enough to make you wish that Jess had dwelt longer on the details, but not enough to make the sketch a worthy partner to the painting it could have been.

Direction of *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* is credited to 'Candy Coster', aka Lina Romay. Romay was becoming more active in the production of Franco's films in the 1980s, and as budgets shrank, those in front of the camera took on other roles behind it. It must be said, however, that the style here feels very much of a piece with Franco's own. Romay's directorial credit was essentially a kind of gift from Franco. For the purposes of this book, and after consultation with co-star Antonio Mayans, I have decided to consider this purely and simply a Jess Franco film, but that's not without remembering that Franco's work could be considered the outgrowth of his close partnership with Romay.

Confesiones is a minor film in the Franco canon, but it still has value to the aficionado. The gauzy melancholy, the intimate

minimalism, the comfortingly familiar locations, the smoky, sensual score, these gossamer things provide just enough stimulus if you crave the Franco magic: a little something to tide you over until the next big hit.

Franco on screen: Franco does not appear in the film but he dubs Antonio Rebollo's character.

Music: The seductively twinkling title theme is called "Atlantide Story" and can be found on the Daniel White LP *Mystère Bleuté*.

Locations: Once again we visit La Manzanera and La Muralla Roja in Calpe, Spain, the amazing modernist apartment complex first seen in *She Killed in Ecstasy* and *Countess Perverse*. The Peñón de Ifach rock formation is also visible in numerous scenes. Shots of the audience supposedly watching Lina's stage act were gathered at a Torremolinos nightclub called Piper's (see also *La noche de los sexos abiertos*).

Connections: Numerous elements in *Confesiones íntimas* – the necrophiliac sex scene, the lead character's suicide attempt, the predominance of female masturbation scenes, the suicide of a significant other, and the overall structure of a woman mentally reviewing her life – resemble Franco's 1975 film *Julietta 69*. The S&M stage show, with its male and female victims spread-eagled on crosses, echoes *Succubus* (1967) and *Exorcism* (1974). The sadness and confessional tone bring to mind *Sinner, Diary of a Nymphomaniac* (1972), although the earlier film is a lot more detailed in both scripting and execution. There's also a strong link to *Nightmares Come at Night* (1969), with both films built around the voice-over memories of a lesbian sex club performer ... Some shots of the audience watching Candy's stage show are derived from the same nightclub footage Franco collected for *La noche de los sexos abiertos*: although the shots are not exactly the same, some of the same faces can be spotted in the crowd, dressed identically in both films.

BOTAS NEGRAS, LÁTIGO DE CUERO

(Spanish theatrical title)

Black Boots, Leather Whip

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-10.340-1982

Alternative titles

Botas negras y látigo de cuero (Spanish listings)

Unconfirmed titles

Botas negras, chicote de couro (BRA theatrical?)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributors

Laurenfilm, S.A. (Spain)
(IMDb adds **D.C. Films**)

Timeline

Shooting date	January	1982
Depósito legal number	25 March	1982
Seville	02 October	1982
Barcelona	04 October	1982
Madrid	24 January	1983

Theatrical running time

Spain 89m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'Videotechnics' PAL VHS 88m41s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown & Jess Franco!']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. make-up: **Manolita García Fraile**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. theme "Bajo el sol" by **Jess Franco & Rebeca White**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. our thanks to Urbanización Riomar and Discoteca Pipers. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Al Pereira). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Lina Daniel). **Asunción Calero** [as 'Ida Balín'] (Rosenthal, blind criminal boss). **Alfredo Kier** (Gene Daniel, Lina's husband). **Rocío Freixas** (Paola, Al's girlfriend). **Genoveva Ojeda/Eva Palmer** [as 'Lorna Green'] ('Bruta', an S&M madame). **Juan Antonio García** [as 'Juan Antonio'] (Paquito, young guy who's screwing Al's girlfriend). **Ángel Ordiales** (bearded attacker in hotel corridor).

Synopsis: *As private eye Al Pereira prepares to flee the city to escape his creditors, he is visited by Lina Daniel, who offers him five thousand dollars if he recovers, on her behalf, a purse containing compromising photos which is hidden in a junkyard. Al gets the purse but is forced to kill two men who assault him, one of whom, Kalman, was the owner of the junkyard. Lina thanks Al by making love to him, and arranges to meet him at the nightclub called the "Latigo de cuero" (Leather Whip), where she performs in a live sex show. At his girlfriend Paola's place, Al finds out that he's wanted for the murder of the two men at the junkyard. Al changes his appearance by cutting his hair and moustache. Later on he finds out that his main creditor, an effeminate man named Gene Daniel, is actually Lina's husband. Pereira understands that he has been manipulated, yet he can't help falling under Lina's spell. She explains to him that Daniel is a gay man who previously tried to be "normal" for*

her love, and she stays with him only for his money. She also reveals that Daniel belongs to a criminal organisation composed of five members – Kalman, an S&M mistress named Bruta, a doctor named Rosenthal, and Daniel's lover – and asks Al to help her kill them all so that they can keep the organisation's money for themselves. Madly in love with Lina, Al agrees. He locates Dr. Rosenthal (a blind woman) but is taken prisoner and tortured by her associates. Al manages to escape and kills Rosenthal. Later on he is attacked by two thugs: he's saved by Paola, who suffers a fatal gun wound. Al eventually shoots Daniel and his lover, Albert, while Lina herself stabs Bruta (who was her lover). Al and Lina meet for the last time: she shoots him while they make love, before leaving with all the money.

Production notes: Franco shot twelve films in 1982, matching and even exceeding his output in the early 1970s. Made immediately after *Confesiones intimas de una exhibicionista*, *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* shares some footage with that film, namely Lina Romay's sexy stage show with a man festooned in tinsel, and the associated cutaways to a nightclub audience. A close-up of a Spanish newspaper, with a headline doctored to match a plot detail, is dated Thursday 14th of January 1982, so production was probably taking place around that time. (The story beneath the doctored headline concerns Margaret Thatcher's son, Mark, who went missing for six days in the Sahara Desert whilst driving in the Dakar Rally. After a large-scale search the Algerian military spotted him on 14 January 1982.) It's worth noting that Antonio Mayans shaves off his moustache on camera in this film: thanks to the speed at which was Franco shooting, this helps to fix the sequence of the next few films he made in 1982!

Review: *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* is a minimalist drama about a cynical sex-addicted detective, a manipulative femme fatale, and a shady organisation of drug racketeers. Guns, sleaze, sadism are all featured, but you can forget about action and adrenalin. Despite the elements of a conventional thriller strewn here and there, events are soon pulled into eccentric orbit around Planet Franco. Matter-of-fact nudity, open vistas, lots of stillness, absolutely no tension but lots of sombre moodiness; these are the hallmarks of the Golden Films period, and *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* is a perfect example. Visually, the film is a combination of elegant geometric compositions, twilit location work, vivid colour (lots of oranges and deep blues) and calculated mundanity (the hotel rooms are neat but downmarket and despite a snooty comment from the supposedly rich Lina, referring to Pereira's car as junk, even the gangsters drive cheap cars). Exteriors oscillate between misty lakesides and tourist trap seaside locations, with a trip to a city dump adding to the desolation.

The star of the show is Franco's perennial loser Al Pereira, the private detective with a habit of getting conned by his clients. Time has clearly taken its toll on Pereira's spirits: he's meaner for a start, perfectly willing to kill in cold blood. When two hoods beat him up in a wrecking yard he shoots one of them in self defence, then

disarms the other and holds him at gunpoint – but after a brief pause he shoots him anyway. According to Pereira's latest client, Lina Daniel, he's known as a man who'll do anything for money, so his standing as a professional is at a low ebb. His fractious relationship with his current girlfriend Paola is on the way out too, and clearly unfulfilling for both of them; Franco repeatedly zooms into a nudie picture pinned to Pereira's sitting room wall, a sure sign that the character is not getting enough pussy. Paola, meanwhile, has taken a younger lover, an insolent teenager who lounges nude in her bed and doesn't bat an eyelid when the 'man of the house' returns unexpectedly. "He's my cousin!", Paola offers, by way of explanation. All of which makes it easier to understand why Pereira would let himself be seduced yet again, on the flimsiest of provocations, by another sexpot client, even though his detective instinct should be screaming 'look out!'. During Pereira's first kiss with Lina Daniel, Franco adds a howling police siren on the soundtrack, but Pereira won't listen to the director's better judgement either. He just yanks down his pants and starts screwing his client over a table, next to a window overlooking the city. Franco gives this sex scene a perfunctory, graceless quality, the emotional coldness of which dp Juan Soler enhances with a deep blue tint to the outdoor vista behind them. The scene takes place without music: both participants reach orgasm, but they separate, unsmiling, immediately it's over.

The comic-erotic highlight of the film sees Pereira held at gunpoint by Paquito, his girlfriend's toyboy, while being whipped by Bruta, a gold-lamé dominatrix. It's all for the amusement of Rosenthal, a blind female doctor and big-time drug-peddler who's displeased with Pereira for killing her minions at the wrecking yard. She listens avidly to Pereira's humiliation, frigging herself by means of a walking stick wedged into her gold pants (yes she wears lamé too), groaning "Harder! Harder!" while savouring the detective's screams and the sound of whip on flesh. The scene then turns from sado-erotic sleaze to delicious black comedy as Pereira manages to knock out Paquito and the dominatrix without the blind woman realising. Whipping the floor and yelping to maintain the illusion that he's still being tortured, he retrieves his gun and cheerfully blows her brains out. The entire sequence is so beautifully conceived and executed that I wouldn't be surprised if it was the kernel around which the whole film formed in Franco's mind: Antonio Mayans informs me that Franco would frequently start shooting a film on the basis of a single scene or technical challenge that he wanted to achieve, so it wouldn't be too far-fetched to surmise that this amusing interlude was the trigger for the whole shebang.

Taken out of context, the whipping scene in this film would paint the director as a sadistic sleaze merchant as effectively as anything from the Erwin Dietrich era. However, the overall tone of this film is quite different. Franco gives his sombre sex-noir an aura of strangeness that approaches science fiction, thanks to frequent oddities of lighting and location, and some bizarre choices of music (see below). Just as Dario Argento once claimed that his

giallo masterpiece *Tenebrae* was set in the near-future, one could make a similarly eccentric case for *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, with the frequent trips to a lakeside idyll photographed at sundown or sunrise representing an escape from a crumbling dystopia, albeit one with seaside views and English theme-pubs.

Critics might say that the repetition endemic to Franco's prolific career is beginning to show in films like this, that the details of his fantasies are being worn away by repeated exposure to the lens. A more considered assessment requires that we take into account the extraordinarily low budgets he was working with, and the remaining sixty-six films he was yet to make at this point in his career: far from running out of steam, Franco was barely two thirds of the way through his astonishing filmography. One can see the depopulated, minimalist vistas of *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* (and the next ten or fifteen films to come) as indicators of a new era in Franco's filmmaking, a period with its own coherent tropes and mannerisms. The reduction of set-ups, the thinning out of casts and the containment of plot structure lend a sleek, streamlined quality to the best films of this period, enhanced by the skilled lighting of Soler (a fight scene in *Botas negras*, taking place in a long corridor tinted deep orange through a slatted window, is especially beautiful). *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* may lack narrative thrills but there's an appealingly forlorn mood to carry you along, and numerous surface attractions to seduce the eye (S&M kinkiness, Lina Romay's ample curves, lots of gold lamé). The story ends on a double murder that seems to cap the Al Pereira story once and for all. At the start of the film he declared, "*I don't know whether I'm leaving by boat, by plane or by casket, but I'm leaving!*": by the end, the choice has been narrowed down to one. Is this really the end for Franco's favourite private eye?

Franco on screen: Jess Franco voices Daniel's male lover, a figure unseen in the film, save for a glimpse in medium shot of his cardigan sleeve and the edge of his glasses. No attempt is made in the dialogue to suggest that this character is some kind of enigmatic éminence grise, so the reason for hiding his face is as obscure as the face itself! As so often in Franco's films, the storyline trails so many loose and ragged threads that it seems poised to split at the seams, while the incredible haste and brevity of the shooting schedules mean that oversights, errors and lacunae are endemic and unavoidable.

Cast and crew: As will become the norm over the next few years, the cast is limited to a handful of players. Dialogue scenes generally involve just two or three participants, and group encounters are rare. Most striking among the cast this time is Alfredo Kier as Gene Daniel, essentially a bisexual character whom Franco portrays, for some reason, as a gay man who has fallen in love with a woman. Was bisexuality so alien a concept to Franco that he could only comprehend it as the crossing of a binary divide? Gene, we are told, has sex with men and keeps a male lover, but he expresses genuine love for his wife Lina, and in the one sex scene between the two of them he functions perfectly well as a physical lover. Although he's feminine in manner and style of dress, he has sex

with a woman and seems sincere about his romantic feelings for her, so on that basis, if something swims like a duck and quacks like a duck... Sexual ambiguity, gender ambivalence and concepts of 'the third sex' grew more and more noticeable in Franco's films of the 1980s, in step with the increased variety of gender options visible in Spanish society during the boom years of 'La Movida' (i.e. the rapid shift towards liberalisation which followed in the wake of General Franco's death). The same trends were visualised in a much more sophisticated way in the early films of Pedro Almodóvar (*Pepi, Luci, Bom, Labyrinth of Passion, Dark Habits, What Have I Done to Deserve This?*), so it's interesting to see Franco – a libertine of sorts, but a man of an older generation – struggling to get a grip on the same phenomenon.

Music: What an odd score Franco has chosen for this film! The demented synthesiser that burbles over the credit sequence sounds like Giorgio Moroder having a nervous breakdown, and things are scarcely less strange during the fight at the wrecking yard, which is accompanied by a single note played on what seems to be a steel-stringed acoustic guitar, slowed down to quarter speed. At a discotheque, dancers bop around to a weird synthesised oddity that would make ideal linking music for an episode of the surreal children's TV show *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* but challenges credulity when offered as pop music for teenage boogie freaks. Elsewhere, the 'disco monks' from *Cocktail spécial* turn up again, and the synthesiser composition "Love in Blue" (available on the Daniel White compilation CD *Ambianza Acoustica*) makes the first of many appearances.

Locations: The credits announce that the film was shot at the Riomar estate (located in Pilar de la Horadada, halfway between Alicante and Cartagena, Spain). However, a glimpse of the distinctive Las Dalias Hotel from the window of Pereira's 'apartment' indicates that some scenes were shot at the Flamingo Hotel on the Av. Isabel Manoja in Torremolinos. The automobile dump where Pereira is attacked by two accomplices of Rosenthal was located in the Playa de los Álamos region of Torremolinos. Interestingly, it seems that Cristobal Infantes Bonadilla, the man who owned and ran the dump in real life, was himself something of a gangster: he was sent to prison in 1986 for fiddling the ID registrations of cars using the defunct vehicles at his disposal ... Shots of the audience supposedly watching Lina's stage act were gathered at a Torremolinos nightclub called Piper's (see also *La noche de los sexos abiertos*).

Connections: Al Pereira is back for the first time since 1978's *Je brûle de partout*, having been usurped for a couple of films by his competitor Al Crosby (a fact which Mayans, who plays both, seems almost to acknowledge when he responds to Lina Romay's question "*Are you Al Pereira?*" with the line, "*I think so, although I'm not too sure anymore*"). Pereira next appears in *Camino solitario* (1983) – but see also *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* (1982) ... Romay's 'Candy Coster' blonde wig, as seen in *Macumba Sexual* and *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista*, is back too. It will in fact be Romay's default 'look' for the next two years.



PORNO - VIOLENCIA AL DESNUDO



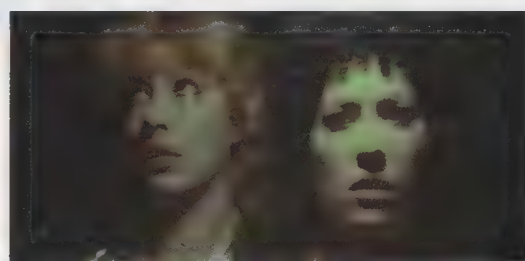
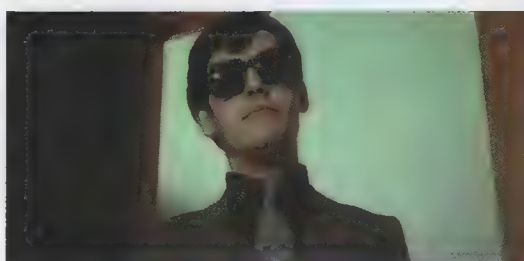
Principales
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IDA BALIN **ALFREDO KIER**
Y EL PORNO SHOW DE MADRID 2000

Dirigida por
JESS FRANCO

Una Presentación de
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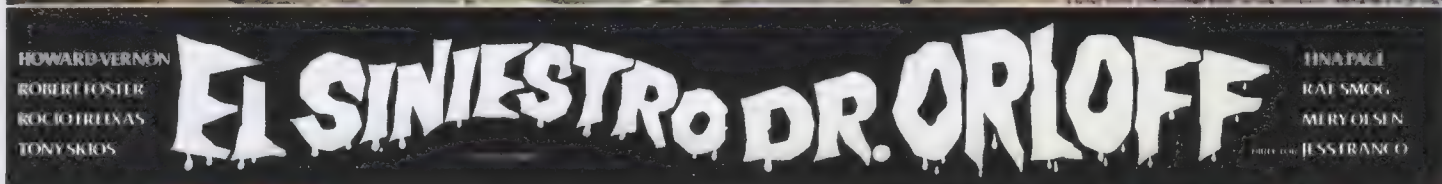
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TOP: Mexican front-of-house poster for Botas negras, látigo de cuero, utilising the same artwork featured on the Spanish language video released in the USA by New Jersey based company Caliente Video. As this artwork did not feature in the Spanish promo materials, it seems likely that Caliente co-ordinated the Mexican theatrical release.

BOTTOM LEFT: Spanish press-sheet artwork for the film, bearing no relationship to the Mexican poster.

BOTTOM RIGHT, CLOCK WISE FROM TOP LEFT: Antonio Mayans, fresh-faced after shaving off his moustache on camera, plays Al Pereira, the private eye who just can't seem to help falling for the sob stories of manipulative dames ... Blind criminal sadist Rosenthal (Asunción Calero aka 'Ida Balin') issues orders to her dominatrix sidekick Bruta (Genoveva Ojeda) ... Pereira agrees to a rendezvous with Lina Daniel at a remote country location ... Pereira finds his on-off girlfriend Paola (Rocío Freixas) shot dead by Rosenthal's goons. Note the beautiful lighting here by Franco and Juan Soler.



TOP: Perico (Ángel Ordiales) finds one of Orloff's victims at an abandoned leisure spot. (The strange collaged-in stonework at the bottom right is part of the original still.)
 BOTTOM L: Alfred Orloff (Antonio Mayans) seduces victim number three (Genoveva Ojeda). BOTTOM R: Spanish poster artwork for the film.

EL SINIESTRO DOCTOR ORLOFF

(Spanish theatrical title)

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-10.341-1982

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributors

Francisco Gratacos Matamaza (source: SMC)

Mediterraneo Films (source: IMDb)

Alternative titles

Experimentos Macabros (SP video)

(Experimentos Macabros) Dr. Orlof (SP video cover)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa Jan-February	1982
Depósito legal number	25 March	1982
Seville	16 April	1983
Madrid	10 May	1984
Barcelona	21 October	1985

Theatrical running time

Spain	87m
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Video running time (converted)

SP 'Aper Video' PAL VHS	86m28s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. make-up: **Manolita García Fraile**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**, performed by **Jess Franco** on the Prophet 5. the theme "Melisa" written by **Jess Franco & Rebeca White**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. sound re-recording studio and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Dr. Alfred Orloff). **Howard Vernon** (Dr. Orloff Snr). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (Inspector Mario Tanner). **Rocío Freixas** (Muriel Tanner/Melissa). **Rafael Cayetano** [as 'Raf Smog'] (Andros). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Malou). **Ángel Ordiales** [as 'Teo Santander'] (Perico aka 'El Bose', a vagabond). **Jess Franco** (Agapito del Pi, proprietor of 'The Golden Thimble'). **Genoveva Ojeda/Eva Palmer** [aka 'Lorna Green'] (3rd victim). **Maria Paz Uceda** [as 'Tina Page'] (Orloff victim). **Maria Amor Olmo** [as 'Mary Olsen'] (Orloff victim).

Synopsis: Alfred Orloff, son of the ailing Dr. Orloff, is obsessed with attempting to revive his burned and comatose mother, Melissa, who is kept in a state of suspended animation at the Orloff residence. With the help of his blind brother Andros, he abducts hookers and 'loose women' from town, and brings them to his laboratory. There, using a machine which extracts the life essence, he attempts to revive his beloved mother (for whom he feels incestuous desires) and restore her beauty. However, the process achieves only fleeting results, and it kills the victims. His father forbids him to continue, declaring that he believes Alfred has become addicted to the thrill of murder, just as he had once done. Alfred disobeys him and continues the hunt for more victims, though he admits to himself that he is indeed taking pleasure from the abductions. A vagabond called Perico, who is hanging around the vicinity, hears screams, and later finds a body. He informs Inspector Tanner, who is being vilified in the newspapers for his lack of success in finding the missing women. Tanner's assistant, Malou, brings Alfred Orloff in for questioning, but Tanner, blinded by Orloff's professional status, dismisses him from the investigation. Meanwhile, Tanner's wife Muriel, sick of the toll her husband's obsession with the case is taking on their marriage, decides to pose as a prostitute in order to flush out the maniac. Her ruse is successful, but she has taken no precautions for this eventuality. Alfred attaches her to his machine but she dies before the process can work. As Alfred and Andros examine Muriel's body, Alfred's father switches on the device, knowing that it will kill his sons. In the ensuing process, Melissa Orloff's consciousness is transferred into Muriel. When Tanner and Malou arrive they find Muriel apparently alive, but it is Melissa Orloff who speaks. Inside the laboratory, Dr. Orloff laughs maniacally...

Production notes: *El siniestro doctor Orloff* followed hot on the heels of *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, in fact it's likely that Franco began collecting material for Orloff while still in Torremolinos working on *Botas negras*. In the earlier movie, shooting from a high hotel balcony, Franco had filmed Antonio Mayans leaving the apartment of his girlfriend Paola (Rocío Freixas) and traversing a zig-zagging modernist walkway down to the street; in *El siniestro doctor Orloff* we see the same zig-zag walkway, shot from exactly the same angle, this time with Rocío Freixas (who appears in both films) walking down it. Given that the vast majority of Orloff was shot in Alicante, not Torremolinos, this is a pretty clear indication that Franco began grabbing material for Orloff while still shooting *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*. Note too that the Depósito Legal numbers are consecutive for *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* (10.339), *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* (10.340) and *El siniestro doctor Orloff* (10.341), which indicates that they were sent off together and registered as a package of three. It's therefore likely that they were shot, edited and dubbed together, probably in as little as one or two months.

Review: *El siniestro doctor Orloff* borrows the basic story outline of *The Awful Dr. Orloff* (1961), shifts agency from the infamous surgeon onto his psychotic son, and infuses the mise-en-scène with cut-price retro sci-fi, harking back to *Dr. Orloff's Monster*

(1964) and *La venganza del Dr. Mabuse* (1971). Sadly, as a return to the site of former glories it substantially lacks the charm of its forebears. What emerges is a pale shadow of the classic original, lacking any of its atmospheric seductiveness. It's a shame, because the core idea could have worked: in place of the middle-European netherworld of the first two Orloff films, Franco relocates the action to the sensation-hungry nightlife of Alicante, with a killer stalking women amid neon-soaked shopping arcades and tawdry tourist attractions. Orloff's son Alfred has taken up the family vice of murder and illicit experimentation, prowling the darkened seafront looking for hookers, or women too drunk to know what they're doing. Once they're back at his conveniently located apartment, he sneaks off and leaves them to the tender mercies of Andros, his brutish leather-jacketed manservant. Impassive behind mirrored sunglasses, Andros resembles a killer from an urban slasher movie like *Don't Answer the Phone* or *Maniac*, raising hopes that this will be a formidable blend of Orloffian chills and contemporary American horror. And yet the monster's role is simply to convey the girls from the apartment to Orloff's hillside hideaway; he doesn't even 'grope the merchandise' as he lugs them through the back-streets. (Don't ask how he can do this without being noticed; Franco doesn't care about plausibility and simply cuts from one location to another.)

This is a film of missed opportunities and, for a supposed horror project, a lack of interest in terror that borders on contempt. Take the monster, Andros: for some reason we are denied a glimpse of his surgically removed eyes until later in the film. Given that the revelation of Morpho's facial deformity is the first effective shock in *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, it's a puzzle why Franco withholds it here for so long. The make-up isn't *that* bad, but nor is it good enough to justify a long build-up. The first scene in *El siniestro doctor Orloff* is more or less the same as the original film, with a tipsy woman going home and disrobing, only to find a monstrous intruder lurking in her bedroom cupboard; a comparison of the two scenes, however, reveals that a lack of visual flair in the way the scene is framed, lit and edited strips it of any tension or excitement. Another of the film's numerous missing beats is any sense of pathos in the characterisation of Andros. Bear in mind that while he may assume the duties of *The Awful Dr. Orloff's* Morpho, he's named after the far more tragic and sensitive 'monster' in the second Orloff film, *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964). Sadly, in *El siniestro doctor Orloff* he lacks both Morpho's ability to terrify and Andros's emotional backstory. This is a shame, because in a throwaway remark Andros reveals that he too is Orloff's son, which makes him Alfred's brother (just as Andros in *Dr. Orloff's Monster* was the brother of the murderous Dr. Fisherman). Alfred, however, never refers to Andros as a relative, and appears to have no feelings about him one way or the other, which rather wastes the potential. There is simply no joined-up character development for anyone in this film: Andros may speak tenderly to Muriel ("I have no eyes, but I know you are good") but he makes no attempt to help her, and later just stands there impassively as she's fitted to Alfred's life-draining apparatus. Even by Franco's standards the plotting is incredibly lackadaisical.

Rather like *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista*, it feels as though Franco lost interest in *El siniestro doctor Orloff* halfway through making it. In the first twenty minutes the parallels to *The Awful Dr. Orloff* are close to the point of mimicry: the scene in which the first victim drunkenly discovers Andros hiding in her closet is almost shot-for-shot the same as the 1961 version, and when Franco himself steps in to tackle the role of a flirtatious and frivolous police witness, originally played by Elena María Tejeiro, the echoes are likewise very strong. All of which suggests that Franco had recently rewatched the film (not impossible, since the first videocassette release came out in 1980) and decided to model the new story quite closely on the old. By the halfway mark, though, Franco's commitment seems to have waned. *The Awful Dr. Orloff* is echoed again when Inspector Tanner's wife Muriel has an unsettling chance encounter with Orloff, which inspires her, at grave risk to herself, to lure him into the open by posing as a hooker (she gets the idea after her husband remarks that the killer would never fall for an undercover policewoman: "*Policewomen in real life aren't like Charlie's Angels. He'd smell them a mile away. They're rather butch and fat!*") Unfortunately the relationship between Tanner and his wife is lacklustre compared to the characters played in the 1961 film by Conrado San Martín and Diana Lorys, and Muriel's decision to go undercover has none of the original's drama or suspense. Franco cannot seem to coax likeable performances out of Antonio Rebollo and Rocío Freixas, neither of whom shine in the roles. Instead of the starry-eyed lovers in the original film we get a rather drab married couple. Even this could have worked, if the script had bothered to add a few character beats. Sadly there's nothing in the dialogue to bring these two cyphers to life.

Most frustrating of all is the lack of detail brought to the killings. Orloff's surgical procedures, which made *The Awful Dr. Orloff* so morbidly compelling, are here replaced with a *very* unsatisfying sci-fi variation, in which life essence is drained from the victims by twisting a few knobs on a control console. Instead of the haunting spectacle of sado-erotic surgery, we get some coloured flashing lights. "*I'm a disciple of yours but times have changed,*" says Alfred to his father, a comment which raises the possibility of a genuine 'remount', as if Franco had been watching, say, the surgical horrors of David Cronenberg. But the rejuvenation scenes are incredibly anachronistic, more like the 1950s than the 1980s. As the process reaches its climax, the victims simply disappear via clumsy lap dissolves, with not so much as a wizened husk or a pile of dust to render the process visceral, plausible or interesting. The sacrifice of three women to revive the killer's mother is scarcely worth the trouble, since the net result is to remove, for a brief shot or two, a thin crust of what looks like icing sugar from her immobile face. Minimalism is all well and good but Franco has stripped down his material too far here. We're given little more than a slow-moving carousel of five or six repeating images in place of a story. A man driving down a street at night ... another man carrying a woman up some stairs ... a hand turning a dial on a machine ... a woman tied to a raised platform ... a catatonic woman with a crusty face

... two men arguing about what to do next... The sequence is set to repeat-play for eighty minutes, and that's simply not enough.

Incest plays a part in the story this time, with Alfred verbally expressing sexual desire to his comatose mother. The twist is appropriate: when the original Doctor Orloff was repairing the visage of his daughter Melissa, his obsessive intensity seemed borderline sexual as well as paternal. Changing the scenario from father-daughter to mother-son allows a twist on the original concept and complements the Oedipal slant of this remake: the son disobeys the father by continuing his experiments and seeks to triumph where the father could not, ultimately intending to usurp him in the bedroom as well as in the laboratory. Why Franco didn't have Orloff Senior discover his son's secret lust is a mystery: it would have made for an explosive confrontation between the two male leads and given extra weight to the finale, in which Orloff deliberately switches on the life-draining apparatus while Alfred and Andros are leaning over the corpse of Muriel Tanner. This somehow triggers the transfer of Melissa's consciousness into Muriel's body, and solves Orloff's problems by getting rid of Alfred and Andros too. If Orloff had known about Alfred's incestuous lust, the sequence would have been all the more horribly effective: the revenge of the father, the triumph of the old order against the new, and the symbolic castration of the son. However, the absence of a shot depicting the death of Alfred suggests that Franco concocted this ending in the editing room and lacked the footage to fully exploit it. We never see the bodies, just the elder Orloff laughing maniacally.

Given that so much of the appeal of *The Awful Dr. Orlof* depended on Gothic style and atmosphere, Franco was taking quite a risk by restaging the story in the present day with a prosaic *mise-en-scène*. Sadly, a few nice compositions and locations here and there do not adequately compensate for the lack of baroque and chiaroscuro delights. Horror films of the 1970s and 1980s replaced Gothic stylisation with increased graphic violence, confronting the dark side of man's cruelty in the full glare of modern sensibilities. Unfortunately, in the early 1980s Franco was going through his most dauntingly dismissive period with regard to graphic violence (*Bloody Moon* excepted), so we get nothing here when it comes to horrific spectacle. But what about sexual sadism? Surely that's how Franco adds shock and excitement to his films? Well, there is one scene with some sado-sexual fire, as Alfred whips a screaming hooker before handing her over to Andros. It stands out in an otherwise lacklustre film, thanks to Mayans's fiery performance, which reminds you that his otherwise poker-faced portrayal is down to directorial choice, not the actor's lack of investment. Otherwise, flashes of mischievous sleaziness are few and far between, although I did admire the way Franco's camera tilted downwards during a victim's strangulation to peer intently at her crotch. A few more moments like that and the film could have earned its stripes.

Franco was capable of so much more, but for some reason this revisiting of the Orloff story doesn't ignite. It feels like the sort of remake one might hurriedly sling together to hang onto the rights

of the original; except that Franco didn't own them in the first place. While it's marginally better than the talky and tedious *Los ojos del doctor Orloff* (1973) and does at least give us the chance to see Howard Vernon back in the role that made him a horror icon, *El siniestro doctor Orloff* simply cannot hold a guttering candle to the Orloff films of the 1960s.

Franco on screen: A minor pleasure comes with Franco's cameo as Agapito, a distinctly camp gentleman of whimsical manner ("*I'm the owner of a very modern haberdashers*") who's witness to the first abduction. He is of course giving us a mincing cover version of the flirtatious female witness in *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, originally played by Elena María Tejero.

Cast and crew: Antonio Rebollo (aka 'Tony Skios') gives a curious performance as Inspector Tanner. The closest thing to a heroic character in the film, he's eclipsed for likeability by Ángel Ordiales as the humorous down-and-out Perico. Rebollo is better playing dislikeable characters; his face more easily conveys cruelty, petulance and resentment. He plays Tanner with a streak of bitterness, his handsome features frequently curling up into almost childish petulance ... It's flip-flop time for Genoveva Ojeda, who plays the victim savagely whipped by Antonio Mayans: in the film immediately before this, *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, she was an S&M dominatrix who whips Mayans. Conversely, she was also the luckless recipient of a pair of heated hair-curling tongs between the legs in *La noche de los sexos abiertos*, wielded by Mayans!

Music: I'm all in favour of aggressively weird synthesiser music but when it comes to aural chaos there's a fine line between scary and irritating, and *El siniestro doctor Orloff*'s maundering, bibbling score crosses it frequently. Essentially one man, his newly acquired Prophet 5 keyboard, and a bottle of Campari, the music sprawls like a drunk's incoherent monologue over the action. Unlike, say, the similarly oppressive music for *Devil Hunter*, it lacks any sense of anchorage to the image, and although it does occasionally click into what you might call 'monkeys-and-typewriters' synchronisation, much of the time it's just annoying. Fortunately Franco includes a few older cues to break up his crude synthetic scribbling: the 'disco monks' are back; likewise the demented synth theme from *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, here recycled as the unlikely music for a seduction. Heavily reverberated clips from the aforementioned *Devil Hunter* ('Carloto Perla' again) and snippets of *Las chicas de Copacabana* can also be heard during Muriel Tanner's midnight walk through Alicante.

Locations: *El siniestro doctor Orloff* was shot on location in Calpe and Alicante, and in some shots we gaze out over the by now familiar extravaganza of Ricardo Bofill's La Manzanera housing complex. Inspector Tanner's office has a giant photo-portrait of La Manzanera on the wall, which suggests that the scene was shot in the estate manager's office.

Connections: Many of the Orloff connections are noted above ... Antonio Mayans appears clean-shaven, having removed his moustache on camera during *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* ... "*You behave as a monster, as I once did*" says Orloff Snr. His son's reply

– “I’ve based my theories on those of Fisher, father” – refers obliquely to Orloff’s disciple Doctor Fisherman in *Dr. Orloff’s Monster* ... Tanner’s assistant Malou is back, having being banished to the outer darkness since *Exorcism* in 1974. Once again he’s the cop with the wacky theories, here suggesting that a vagrant’s account of women appearing out of thin air may tie in with the theories of Jacques Bergier, real life author of *Le Matin des Magiciens*, a book which, among other esoteric notions, suggested that the early alchemists had a working knowledge of the structure of the atom. It’s a pity Franco didn’t tease out such arcane notions in the script instead of leaving them to dangle in throwaway dialogue! ... The sinister all-red décor in the room where the victims are killed is reminiscent of similar chambers in Franco’s *Venus in Furs* (1968) and *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970).

Other versions: At the time of publication, two versions of this film exist. The first is the 1984 video release, a way-too-dark video transfer struck from a scratchy 35mm print, retitled *Experimentos macabros* via a crudely inserted video title card; the second is a version bearing the original title, screened on Spanish TV. In terms of picture quality the TV version is by far the best way to see this film. Note: a transfer from the TV transmission available on peer-to-peer sites is missing approximately seven minutes, seemingly due to digital reception problems on the part of the original uploader.

LA CASA DE LAS MUJERES PERDIDAS

(Spanish theatrical title)

The house of lost women

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-24.614-1982

Alternative title

Perversión en la isla perdida (SP alt. – Golden Films Video)

Perversion on the Lost Island

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributors

Laurenfilm, S.A. (Spain)

IMDb adds **D.C. Films**

Timeline

Shooting date	circa Summer	1982
Depósito legal number	22 July	1982
Seville	26 February	1983
Barcelona	26 May	1983
Madrid	30 June	1983

Theatrical running time

Spain

90m

Video running times (converted)

SP TV transmission (from PAL source)

92m31s

SP ‘Golden Films’ PAL VHS

91m42s

“Sex and sadism in that lonely house”

“All sorts of sexual aberrations between a mother and her stepdaughter”

“Came a hunter: took two ‘rabbits’ and left a ‘stag’”

Ad-lines from Spanish press advertisements.

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. music: **Daniel White** [as ‘Pablo Villa’] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. song “Winter Sonata” written by **Jess Franco** and **Rebeca White**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. Musical theme: “Sonata Invernal” by **Jesús Franco** and **Rebeca White**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as ‘Candy Coster’] (Desdemona Pontecorvo). **Antonio Mayans** (Mario Pontecorvo aka ‘Capitan’). **Carmen Carrión** (Dulcinea Pontecorvo). **Susana Kerr** (Poulova Pontecorvo). **Antonio Rebollo** [as ‘Tony Skios’] (the stranger aka ‘Tony Curtis’). Note: the Spanish pressbook lists the family name as Mendoza. Dulcinea is referred to as ‘Carmen’ in the synopsis but Dulcinea in the accompanying cast list.

Synopsis: *The Pontecorvo family live on an island off the coast of Spain. Head of the family is Mario, an actor who has withdrawn from the world. With him are his two daughters – Poulova, who is mentally handicapped, and Desdemona, who is bright and sexually frustrated. He has a new wife, Dulcinea, a bitter sadistic woman who abuses her stepdaughters. Mario regales his family with tales of his life as an actor in Argentina, and claims to have been forced to leave there after a scandal involving an under-age girl. Desdemona is entranced by her father’s stories, and by her father as a man: she attempts to seduce him but he declines. Desdemona must satisfy herself with masturbation, something which she also trains her sister to practise. Mario’s sex life is unsuccessful: he cannot fulfil his role and leaves his wife angry and frustrated. Into this hermetic world comes a nameless man, who declares himself a hunter. Mario demands to know if the man is from Interpol, but he denies it. Dulcinea and Desdemona just want to get him into bed. Mario’s stories of scandal and adventure are revealed to be delusions: he is a fantasist and pathological liar. The hunter turns out to be a journalist researching a story. He leaves the island, declaring that no longer wishes to interview Mario and will not be publishing anything. Dulcinea leaves with him. Mario, who cannot bear the humiliation, becomes deranged and commits suicide. Desdemona is left alone to care for her handicapped sister...*

Production notes: *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* was based on a script idea that Franco had first put down on paper in the 1960s, with celebrated screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière. In 1982, after trying without success to interest Carrière in revisiting the text, Franco went ahead and filmed it anyway...

Review: A precious nugget of dauntingly introverted bleakness from the Golden Films period, *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* is a claustrophobic tale of incest and family manners, enacted by a tiny cast and set predominantly in one cramped location. It's a rare example of a Franco film with a domestic setting, and as with the similarly themed *Eugenie* (1970), 'domesticity' for him means 'incest'. Brooding, sick and darkly funny, this is one of the strongest films of Franco's Golden Films period, and providing you can adjust to its measured pace and minimalist aesthetic it's a strange and unsettling experience.

Our guide to this hermetic and troubled world is Desdemona Pontecorvo, who lives with her retired actor father Mario, her mentally handicapped sister Poulova, and her stepmother Dulcinea. After a sombre voice-over monologue from Desdemona ("*No one comes or goes; nothing changes*") the story begins with her lounging around half-dressed, her bedroom door wide open, masturbating in full view of her mildly embarrassed father, who hides behind a magazine and pretends not to see. Later she masturbates again while spying on Mario having sex with Dulcinea. In conversations with her father, Desdemona makes it clear that she desires him sexually, demanding compliments about her firm young breasts and telling him he's far better looking than his idol, Ramon Novarro. Too self-absorbed to address his daughter's behaviour, Mario greets these flagrantly incestuous overtures with half-hearted references to social stigma and disapproval. (Comically, although he thinks nothing of letting his daughter masturbate openly in the house, she must hide her cigarettes and smoke furtively when she's alone.)

Sex is a constant presence in this household, and even mentally handicapped Poulova is drawn into it. In a disturbingly farcical scene Desdemona teaches her sister to masturbate, and in a much darker sequence later on we see Dulcinea thrashing the poor girl, pulling aside her dressing gown and whipping her exposed vagina with a riding crop. Dulcinea's style of maternal discipline is relentlessly sexual: after assaulting Poulova she punishes Desdemona, who's been watching, by making the girl lick her feet and forcing her into mutual cunnilingus. Mario, meanwhile, is nowhere to be seen, although he never leaves the house. We're left to assume, by his permanent lethargy, that instead of protecting his daughters from their wicked stepmother he is merely flicking indolently through a magazine in the next room.

The lonely isolation enveloping the Pontecorvos is subtly Sadean in emphasis, positing the family unit as the ultimate 'castle of perversion'. Mario Pontecorvo owns the island, and there are no other residents. Provisions are brought to the island by boat every week. Within this dreadful isolation, Desdemona has grown to be somehow kind and intelligent, albeit with an absence of sexual

boundaries. The driving force of her incestuous transgressions is enforced idleness. Boredom is the first thing we learn about her: as she surveys the beach and gazes at the rolling sea, her voice-over informs us that she has long since grown indifferent to the island's beauty. In fact she hates the place, having been forced to live there since childhood. All that she has by way of escape are her fantasies about distant lands (inspired by the sight of aeroplanes flying over the island) and the tacky stimulus of American soap operas on TV. Puberty has stoked Desdemona's loneliness and frustration even further: her sexualised anger is evident when we see her rubbing a lit cigarette on the breasts of a carved statuette of Venus, and later another cigarette into the eye of a face on a Toby Jug. (She also masturbates with a slice of peeled orange – I'm no expert but wouldn't that sting a little?)

The incestuous aspects of the story are compromised slightly by Franco's decision to make Dulcinea a stepmother rather than a mother, a contrivance one supposes was motivated by the likelihood of censorship. Given that *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* is in essence an attack on the bourgeois family, borne of an old script co-written by Jean-Claude Carrière, who worked for the master of such tales, Luis Buñuel, it makes a lot more sense if we regard the abusive Dulcinea as the girls' real mother, exploiting the power she has carved for herself in this house with a gutless father-figure. This would give the scenes in which Dulcinea whips Poulova and sexually abuses Desdemona an extra frisson of horror, while demonstrating the utter decadence of the household.

As shocking as the subject matter is, some viewers may find the film's lack of urgency problematic. The plotting is as torpid as the lives of the characters, and anyone looking for narrative thrills is advised to look elsewhere. On the other hand, if you've acclimatised to the way Franco works, this eerie slow motion chamber drama is weirdly compelling. The theme is entrapment and psychological bondage, and Franco captures the stifling nature of the subject very well indeed. It's a cynical film, with little joy or light, apart from the amusement one can glean from the baroque sadism of the stepmother and the highly inappropriate family dynamics (the parents can't even be bothered to close their bedroom door when they make love in their tiny single storey house). Franco's view of domesticity is scathing; the choice is between bourgeois surrender to a life mediated by trash culture (radio and TV shows twitter endlessly in the background) or a pressure-cooker world of sexual perversion and incestuous abuse. The Pontecorvos wallow in both of these behavioural tarpits, before the dam bursts and the patriarch's emptiness leads to his psychological implosion and the speedy departure of the stepmother.

Antonio Mayans may be a shade too young to convince as Lina Romay's father, even with streaks of grey added to his hair, but he nevertheless gives one of his best performances here. The failed and fraudulent Mario is a meatier, more complex role than usual for the period and Mayans rises to the occasion with aplomb, delivering the subtleties denied to him in Franco's less detailed creations. The critical moment comes when the undercover journalist (Antonio

Rebollo), who has invaded Mario's household and seduced his wife, declares that he has changed his mind and no longer intends to write a feature about him. This kick in the teeth has the hallmark of a bad dream, certainly for an actor if not for Franco! Mario's fragile ego collapses under the weight of his own lies, and Mayans captures the sad pathetic horror of it all perfectly. It's typical of Franco's black sense of humour that Mario's lies about his past include casual claims of sexual abuse, claims which his daughter finds attractive. When she asks him why he left Argentina, he tells her it was because he'd once seduced an under-age girl there. Desdemona is delighted by this admission ("How romantic!") and demands to know why he doesn't therefore seduce her too. Later, when the journalist has spilled the beans about Mario's true backstory, she sneers, "Nothing you say is true. You didn't even rape that girl!" (Only in a Franco film would a character be humiliated by the revelation that he is *not* a rapist!) Carmen Carrión is likewise spot-on as the mean, abusive stepmother and both Lina Romay and 'Susana Kerr' do well with their roles. Kerr, one of the mystery figures in Franco's repertory cast, is especially convincing as the mentally handicapped Poulouva, making the scenes in which the poor girl is tortured by her stepmother genuinely horrible.

One may be tempted to compare *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* with Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968), drawing parallels between the arrival of Antonio Rebollo's 'hunter' and Terence Stamp's charismatic stranger, who seduces each member of a bourgeois household and precipitates familial breakdown. However, the comparison asks too much of Franco's plotting and ignores the fate of his characters. The visitor has sex with Desdemona, but shows no interest in Poulouva. He seduces the wife and humiliates the husband, upon which the latter commits suicide. The daughters are left behind; Desdemona is last seen pushing her sister along the seafront in a wheelchair. The film is therefore totally pessimistic; there's no revolutionary charge at all. As one might expect in Franco's Sadean universe, the only person who gets anything out of the situation is the stepmother; despite beating and sexually humiliating her stepdaughters she gets off scot free, running away with the virile newcomer whose moral outlook is clearly as mercenary as hers. This means the daughters are spared any further violence, but Desdemona is left alone to care for an invalid, surely no one's idea of freedom. "I can leave whenever I want. But where to?" she wonders. As for Poulouva, she remains as deeply lost to the world at the end of the film as she was at the beginning.

Music: The piano theme by Daniel White which recurs throughout the film is a mournful variant on White's melody for the 1973 Franco film *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* (the latter known as 'Eromantic Love' on the *Ambianza Acoustica* CD), with just a dash of Friedrich Gulda's theme for *Necronomicon* (1967) thrown in for good measure. The bordello piano theme from *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* makes another appearance during Desdemona's masturbation scene with a miniature statue of Venus.

Locations: Antonio Mayans recalls that the film was shot near Málaga.

Connections: The name Desdemona derives from the Greek, meaning 'ill-fated' ... Dulcinea was the true love and muse of Don Quixote in Cervantes' novel, a woman fictionalised by the hero to suit his own romantic fantasies: from a farm girl into a princess. There's not a lot of true love on show between Mario and his Dulcinea, but the suggestion of a man's fantastical enrichment of woman to match his own egotistic requirements is apt given Mario's fantasist tendencies. The name also has lexical roots suggesting excessive sweetness, a no-doubt deliberate irony given the monstrous character of the mother in this film ... The stranger claims he is a fan of Mario Pontecorvo's, having admired his performance in "*the silent version of Jeromin by Padre Coloma that introduced you as a great actor.*" Luis (aka Padre) Coloma was a 19th century Spanish novelist, biographer and prolific writer of short stories whose *Jeromin* (a biographical work about the 16th century Spanish nobleman Juan De Austria) was not to my knowledge adapted for the silent screen, but was first made into a film in 1953 by Luis Lucia. Regardless, the suggestion that Mario Pontecorvo gained his fame playing a character in silent movies suggests that he is supposed to be in his late sixties at least! ... Franco once compared *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* to Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, which, to give him credit, takes a lot of nerve. The remark does make some sense however, given that the original concept for the film was laid out in a script written by Franco in 1965 with Buñuel's regular collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière (Carrière co-wrote two films with Franco that year, *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Attack of the Robots*) ... "Ophelia, Get thee to a nunnery!" Mario tells Desdemona, quoting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as he suffers a mental breakdown. The remark, though basically just a fragment of any stage actor's repository of quotations, has resonance with the incest theme, given that Hamlet, though speaking to Ophelia, was in truth expressing rage towards his mother for having married his uncle ... The relationship between nymphomaniac Desdemona and her retarded sister Poulouva echoes that of the sisters in Franco's similarly claustrophobic sex drama *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973) ... Desdemona masturbates while watching *Dallas* on an unseen TV, although the dialogue we hear is improvised in the soap-opera style by Franco's cast, and the music is the title theme from *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* ... This is the only Jess Franco film to mention Margaret Thatcher: an unseen newspaper headline read out by Mario claims, bizarrely, that the British prime minister is getting married in Washington! In reality Thatcher was married long before 1982, to her lifelong husband Denis ... Desdemona's habit of masturbating with a statue of Venus recalls the scene in Franco's *Kiss Me Killer* (1973) in which Romay frolics nude with a statue of David, and looks forward to a scene in *El oje de Lulú* in which Romay enjoys a close encounter with an Oscar statuette ... Mayans can be seen reading the January 1982 edition of the Spanish film magazine *Fotogramas*.

Other versions: Some copies of the Spanish video release (*Perversión en la isla perdida*) ran just fifty-nine minutes; fortunately a complete version was transmitted on Spanish TV in 2017.

THE INCONFESSABLE ORGIES OF EMMANUELLE

(USA/UK DVD title)

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-16.684-1982

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Las orgías inconfesables de Emmanuelle (SP)

Alternative titles

Emmanuelle Exposed (UK video)

Unconfirmed titles

Emmanuelle's secret orgies (US video [MF])

Emanuelle's Wicked Orgies (unknown – possibly an illegally marketed DVD)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Laurenfilm, S.A.

Timeline

Shooting date	circa Spring	1982
Depósito legal number	17 May	1982
Barcelona	29 November	1982
Seville	18 December	1982
Madrid	14 March	1983
Murcia	24 October	1983

Theatrical running time

Spain	86m
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DVD running time

US 'Severin' NTSC DVD	86m28s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. music: Daniel J. White [as 'Pablo Villa'], leitmotif by **Rebeca White**. music recording: **Eurosonic** (Madrid). system: Dolby. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Muriel Montossé** [as 'Vicky Adams'] (Emmanuelle/originally 'Ann-Marie'). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster']

(Andreas). **Carmen Carrión** (Carmen). **Asunción Calero** [as 'Ida Balín'] (María). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (Marqués de Altuna, Antonio Jaime Moraleda de los Enhebro). **Ángel Ordiales** (rapist wearing sunglasses).

Synopsis: *Emmanuelle and her husband Andreas enjoy a second honeymoon near Torremolinos on the southern coast of Spain. Exploring a local wax museum, they make love surrounded by the exhibits. That evening, they attend a bar and watch María, a stripper. Emmanuelle is aroused and joins María on stage. A jealous Andreas leaves in disgust. Emmanuelle is taken home by Carmen, an older woman, who makes love with her the next morning. Later that day, María seduces Andreas, who resentfully plays along when she invites him back to her room. All this is observed by María's husband, the Marqués de Altuna, Antonio Jaime Moraleda de los Enhebro, who expounds his theories about the nobility of the Spanish lover, the disposability of women, and the disgusting aspects of perversion. Andreas makes contact with Emmanuelle and asks her to meet him at a bar. A contrite Emmanuelle readily agrees. However, on her way to their meeting she is attacked and raped by two men. By the time she recovers and makes her way to the rendezvous, Andreas has given up on her and left. Emmanuelle once again makes love with María, and with the Marqués, whose bedroom prowess falls sadly short of his boastful promises. Finally Andreas and Emmanuelle reunite and make love in the Marqués's house...*

Production notes: Also sent off together for their Depósito numbers were *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* and its immediate successor *El hotel de los ligues...*

Review: Distinctly lacking when it comes to orgies, 'inconfessable' or otherwise, this is at first glance a light, easy-to-digest movie, beautifully photographed in picturesque locations. However, there's a subtle thread of blackness running within which stays in the mind afterwards. It may seem initially to lack the delirium for which Franco is celebrated, offering softcore sex with little of the usual madness or depravity, but as the story drifts along we find ourselves in the company of a highly disagreeable 'narrator' whose views cast uncomfortable shadows over the film's sunny frolics. Unfortunately we also encounter Franco here at his most unyieldingly two-dimensional when it comes to character, resulting in some vital scenes lacking emotional detail.

The film's surface attractions are undeniable. As usual with Franco the architectural choices are striking and unusual; the modernist abode of the Marqués is particularly impressive, its huge picture windows offering stunning views across unpopulated Spanish countryside, while the interior is a smorgasbord of trendy 1970s furniture and chic interior stonework. But is there anything else going on besides the lovely visuals? Struggling at first to find purchase on the film's wipe-clean surfaces is a sustained satire on the Spanish male's self-image as lover extraordinaire. Franco's script suggests that traditional machismo is a blend of misogyny and cynicism, something the Marqués's voice-over lets slip repeatedly.

"I would like to give her a lesson, to drive her mad in the way that we, the respectable men in Spain, know how to do it. And then, despise her." Unlike, say, The Marquis De Sade, the Marqués de Altuna is an old-fashioned prude when it comes to sexual variety: "Women with women. I try to adapt to these changes. To be liberal about it. But there are certain things that make me sick." It's fair to say that while a woman occupies the title role, the Marqués is the real subject of this film, and he really is a piece of work. His oafish and ineffectual one-minute sex scene with Emmanuelle ("Here I am: I'm going to show you how a noble Spaniard makes love") is bad enough, but his final speech, in which he states that he prefers his dog to his wife because at least the dog is a pedigree breed, reveals that this peeping tom who hates 'perverts', this 'super-lover' who can only hump for a minute before climaxing, this man of alleged refinement who treats women as trash, is as much a monster as the more bloodthirsty creations elsewhere in Franco's catalogue. Franco draws this portrait of a privileged creep then, metaphorically speaking, screws it up and throws it away. As Andreas says in the waxworks museum when his wife points out that their tryst is being 'observed' by a waxwork of Dracula: "It's a long time since I cared about the opinion of monsters. They are all very hypocritical."

So far so good – but despite the satirical attack on masculinity, *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* is hardly a feminist work. Following on from the casual depiction of rape in *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, Franco once again appears stubbornly disinterested in the after-effects of sexual violence. The scene in which Emmanuelle is raped, which really ought to have been pivotal to the drama, is both strikingly composed and troublingly 'light' in its impact on the rest of the narrative. Attacked by two unkempt louts in the baking noonday heat, our heroine is stretched out and violated on a large rock like some primitive offering to a brutal Sun God. Once the rapists have left, she slowly regains her composure and gets dressed. Heading for the bar where she's arranged to meet her husband, she breaks down and sobs when she finds it closed and the street outside empty. The next day, however, she's up and about, sunbathing nude at the house of the Marqués, and just a short while later she allows him to screw her. So, what to make of this sequence of events? Without the benefit of a good script it seems either callous or frivolous of Franco to depict a woman so undamaged by sexual assault that she blithely makes out with a virtual stranger the following day. One assumes that Emmanuelle has decided not to let the attack compromise her adherence to the principle of free love, although whether such a pragmatic (and, let's be clear, admirable) response is truly possible the day after being raped is highly questionable. Paul Verhoeven's 2016 masterpiece *Elle* explores this very idea, but it brings to the table a commitment to subtle psychological detail utterly alien to Franco. Brilliantly acted and probingly scripted, *Elle* sets up a similarly outré scenario (a woman responds to rape with extraordinary coolness and determination) but does so far more plausibly. Franco, on the other hand, offers us a couple of long shots of the heroine sunbathing, followed by a scene of her

looking bored during sex with the Marqués. It's asking a lot for us to read these images as emblematic of defiance and determination. Franco's habitual preference for psychological flatness means that any sense of Emmanuelle's emotional turmoil or intellectual resolve can only be speculatively attributed, and while I don't mind filling in a few gaps for myself, it's best to have at least some faint guidelines. Interviewed on the Severin DVD, Franco discusses the film as though the heroine's decision to defy her rapists and commit herself to sexual freedom is plain for all to see, when in fact it's simply a notion we vaguely impute to the character when faced with the script's lack of detail.

Flattened affect, emotional detachment and opaque characterisation are familiar tools in Franco's stylistic arsenal, but sometimes a story demands a different approach. If the aftermath of the rape had been given any kind of serious attention in the script, the film would have been transformed. Instead, it lacks heart or emotional honesty, and fails to support itself dramatically. This problem is not just confined to the rape scene. Where *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* really comes unstuck, for me, is in the lengthy final scene, which Franco smilingly called 'ambiguous' in an interview given for the Severin DVD. In it, we see Emmanuelle making love with Andreas, while across the same room the Marqués screws Maria. According to Franco, the ending shows that Emmanuelle has chosen freedom over obligation, but frankly the scene is hard to read this way. When Andreas says to Emmanuelle, as justification for the couples' voyeurism, that the Marqués will enjoy being watched, Emmanuelle chides him sarcastically ("Your friend Maria won't care if we watch them either, right?") before grabbing her husband's jaw and steering his gaze back to her. It feels very much as if Emmanuelle's hypocritical jealousy (which was rampant in *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*) is firmly back in the saddle. The 'swinging couples' arrangement that follows seems to amuse only Maria, whom we see laughing and eyeing up the others. Emmanuelle is disapproving and jealous, the moralistic Marqués is disappointed with himself (he describes the encounter in voice-over as a "shameful adventure [that] won't happen again") and Andreas is a thwarted participant forced by his wife to turn away from voyeuristic pleasure. Quite at odds with Franco's claim that Emmanuelle embraces freedom, it seems to me far more evident that bourgeois sexual norms are simply falling back into place. Given that we only have two lines of dialogue to clarify any of this, however, the characters and their true feelings remain frustratingly opaque. Consequently the ending is a bit of a damp squib, although the Marqués' repugnant closing narration, in which he declares a preference for pedigree dogs over women, goes some way towards compensating for the lack of onscreen fireworks.

Music: This time "Love in Blue" by Daniel White (previously heard in *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*) takes pole position during the credits. As for the rest: are the disco monks here? Of course. A jazz version of "La vie est une merde"? Naturally. An ominous Spanish guitar number? You bet...

Locations: Much of the film takes place in and around the rocky coves and coastal promontories close to the Spanish coastal resort of Águilas, in the province of Murcia. The rocky outcrop on which Emmanuelle is raped is also visible in the opening beach scene of *La casa de las mujeres perdidas*, which was shot immediately before. The Spanish town where the Marqués takes his strolls is Mojácar, a municipality situated in Almería. An elevated village of white-painted houses clustered together on a mountainside, Mojácar has been a settlement for many centuries and is one of the most stunningly beautiful locations in Franco's work. Some scenes were filmed at the "London Wax Museum" in Torremolinos, located on the Carretera de Cádiz. An offshoot of Madame Tussaud's, opened in 1972, it is sadly no longer in business.

Connections: This is pretty much a direct sequel to *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*: it once again stars Muriel Montossé and Antonio Mayans as Emmanuelle and Andreas, a husband and wife with seemingly endless sexual problems. Here we meet them on their 'second honeymoon', which the voice-over tells us they've undertaken in order to patch up their struggling relationship: "*They'd been a long time apart because of the many lovers and flings she had. But the man, who was a diplomat of the highest social class and of great nobility, ended up forgiving her.*" Rather like Ash in *Evil Dead 2*, however, the couple find themselves sucked into the same horrendous situations with seemingly no useful awareness of what went before. Once again, Emmanuelle gets steaming drunk, loses her self-control in a bar, climbs on stage and puts on an impromptu sex show (this time with another woman) and humiliates her jealous hubby. And once again she's then raped by some passing hoodlums. What's striking, however, are the changes to the scenario. Instead of rape 'opening up' Emmanuelle to the joys of rough sex with strange men, this time she gets no pleasure from what happens (although it doesn't prevent the men from claiming she's enjoying it). Also, the rape is not a direct response to Emmanuelle's drunken performance at the bar. Perhaps this revised storyline was Franco's way of correcting what he felt was wrong with *Aberraciones*? ... Apparently the title of this outing was chosen by the producers, reflecting the continued international box-office pull of the word 'Emmanuelle'. This was the second time a Franco film had been tagged misleadingly with the Emmanuelle brand name, the first instance being *Des frissons sur la peau* (1973) which was retitled *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle*. There, the producer Marius Lesoeur followed the example of Italian sleaze maestro Joe D'Amato by removing a letter 'm' from Emmanuelle to avoid prosecution. However, *Las orgías inconfesables de Emmanuelle* doesn't bother with this precautionary move, no doubt because the Golden Films titles were so rarely sold abroad.

Problematica: According to the IMDb, a US video catalogue once listed the film as 'Emmanuelle Forever'. However, as I've been unable to find this source I have my doubts. There is a 1993 French TV film called *Éternelle Emmanuelle*, directed by Francis Leroi, so perhaps the video catalogue entry was a translation of this?

EL HOTEL DE LOS LIGUES

(Spanish theatrical title)

translation: *Pick-Up Hotel* or *The Hotel of Love Affairs*

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-16.685-1982

Alternative title

Polvo de 4 estrellas (depósito legal registration title)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributors

Laurenfilm, S.A. (Spain)

(IMDb adds **Cinedrac S.A.**)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa Spring	1982
Depósito legal number	17 May	1982
Seville	11 February	1983
Barcelona	07 March	1983
Madrid	06 October	1983

Theatrical running time

Spain	81m
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Video running times (converted)

SP TV transmission (from PAL source)	80m40s
SP 'Mercury Films' PAL VHS	81m10s

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. make-up: **Manolita G. Fraile**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. the theme "Secreto hotel" written by **Rebeca White**. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Eva Bombón). **Asunción Calero** [as 'Ida Balín'] (Ilsa, German woman with young lover). **Juan Antonio García** [as 'Juan Antonio'] (Chavura, the young lover). **Genoveva Ojeda/Eva Palmer** [aka 'Lorna Green'] (Rosie, woman on blind date). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Feliú, man on blind date). **Carmen Carrión** (Joanna Martine). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Pierre Martine). **Ángel Ordiales** (Carrasco, the handyman/gardener).

Synopsis: *Three couples arrive at the same hotel trying to refresh their love lives. There's a gay man who's married for convenience, accompanied*

by his frustrated wife; a bumbling bag of nerves and his blind date from the Canary Islands; and a German 'cougar' and her Spanish gypsy 'toyboy'. Also on holiday at the hotel is a porn actress whose vivacious manner swiftly arouses everyone. Soon, she has seduced both men and women. Thanks to the resulting sexual adventures, the three couples are brought closer together...

Production notes: A script called *Polvo de cuatro estrellas* ('Four-star Fuck') registered with the Spanish Biblioteca Nacional in 1982 is a draft version of *El hotel de los ligues*.

Review: Comedy, one of the hardest of film genres to get right, depends heavily on good writing and painstaking direction, a fact that *El hotel de los ligues* confirms in negative. A relentlessly inconsequential softcore giggle, lacking visual invention or even a spark of sexual excitement, it's a remake of an old Franco script – 1978's *Elles font tout* – which was among his least scintillating in the first place. Usually there's at least one scene in a Franco film that makes it all worthwhile: here, we are truly looking for scraps. At a push I would say that *El hotel de los ligues* has precisely one moment of comedy inspiration, in which Lina Romay, hiding under a restaurant table, sucks spaghetti from a man's penis while he eats a plate of pasta.

El hotel de los ligues is further hampered by its disappointingly conservative sexual politics. The plot revolves around three couples whom we meet as they check in to a hotel: there's an older woman (Ida Balin) whose toyboy lover (Juan Antonio García) is getting bored with her, a 'gay' (or shall we say sexually confused) husband (Antonio Mayans) who can only make it with his wife (Carmen Carrión) by thinking about Paul Newman while she screws him with a dildo, and a man on a blind date (played by director of photography Juan Soler) who is so inexperienced sexually that his bossy new lover (Genoveva Ojeda) must instruct him in the basics of thrusting. The subsequent arrival of porn star Eva Bombón (Lina Romay) triggers mass infidelity, but eventually the couples' problems are solved by exposure to Eva's bubbly sexuality. The result is a surprisingly meek film from a director usually far more inclined towards joyful chaos than order. Instead of pushing the inherent dysfunction of the couples to a point where lives must change, Franco seeks merely the restitution of 'normality'. No greater freedom is embraced, nor any life-changing realisations. Does the young gigolo decide that making out with an older woman for whom he feels nothing but contempt is demeaning to both of them? No. Franco's idea of a humorous resolution sees the youth vigorously screwing his middle-aged meal ticket and saying to the camera, "*The things you have to do to eat!*" Quite why a brief fling with a younger woman helps him to get it up for the nagging 'cougar' he was so bored with earlier is not explained. Does the mincingly camp character played by Antonio Mayans abandon his sham marriage, hook up with another man, and stop making his wife miserable? No. Instead we see him miraculously making love to her as she sits astride him: this time it's she who is

moaning "*Mmmm Paul Newman! Paul Newman!*", and the sex toys are left in the cupboard. The suggestion is that once this screaming gay stereotype tastes the delights of Lina Romay's pussy ("*Oh, the beast in me is coming out!*") his homosexual fantasies can be re-allocated to a more acceptable gender position. Soler as the inexperienced lover, meanwhile, having tasted the fruits of group sex, has the confidence to make love without instruction, and his control-freak date accepts his new attitude without comment. None of this makes a jot of sense, and it's not very funny either. The story seems little more than a wish-fulfilment exercise for Lina Romay, given that it posits her as the spiritual precursor of viagra, leaving a 24-hour trail of rampant erections wherever she goes.

Meanwhile, in a script with only nine characters there's a surprisingly dismissive attitude towards the employees at this 'hotel of flings'. The pretty maidservant never gets any action, and the gardener Carrasco is relentlessly lampooned as disgusting: for instance, when Eva is taking all comers, Carrasco brags that he hasn't washed his genitals for three days, to cries of disgust from the others. It's an attitude amplified by one of the film's more shocking lines, when Eva begs forgiveness from the women whose men she has seduced. Explaining that she's a nymphomaniac who cannot resist physical advances, she declares, "*Every time someone nudges me, or touches me, or starts groping me, I just can't resist! [...] it could be a man, a woman, a kid, or rank and file.*" Leaving aside the reference to paedophilia for a moment, the delineation of the 'rank and file' (i.e. workers) as a separate category to men and women is weirdly offensive from a director who once claimed to be a communist! One might counter this critique by saying that it's Eva, not Franco, who is speaking, but that would require that we think in terms of characterisation, which in the context of this film is like pinning a fancy tail on a non-existent donkey. There's no sign elsewhere that Eva is some kind of supercilious rich girl who regards working men as subhumans, and if there were it would scarcely sit well with her central role as the heroine of the picture who skips off into the sunset, bottom wiggling, at the end of the film. The three couples not only get to taste the delights of sex with Eva, they have their relationships 'healed' and their chances of future happiness improved: Carrasco, on the other hand, gets a roll on the sofa with Eva during the orgy, but at the end of the picture he's left as a lonely voyeur, with no one to share his desires. At the very least you'd have thought Franco might have paired him up with the maid; at least then the 'rank and file' would have a chance of happiness too...

Humour in the film, such as it is, comes from a variety of off-kilter remarks by the women ("*You can crush your dick with a big rock for all I care!*"), and the bizarre or pathetic reactions of the men. We've noted that Franco often treats rape purely as fodder for his sex fantasies, with no room for grubby reality to intrude (see in particular *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*). In the case of *El hotel de los ligues* we're asked to chuckle at Eva's tall story about being raped as a very little girl. Obviously we're not



ABOVE: Joanna (Carmen Carrión) lends a helping hand to Rosie (Genoveva Ojeda).
 BELOW: The inexperienced Feliú (Juan Soler Cózar) finds sex with his blind date Rosie problematic.



meant to take anything seriously in this film, and Eva is probably lying anyway, but if you're going to tell outrageous jokes, you'd better make them funny: "*At five I was raped by the gardener. A year later, by the milkman. And when I was eight, the baker raped me. We've had free bread ever since, but...*" It behaves like a joke, at a purely structural level, but the style is too hackneyed for such a shocking subject; what ends up being offensive is not the taboo element but the cheap frivolity of the witticism.

Finally, what really sinks this film is its lack of even a scintilla of visual interest. In this respect it suffers from the same problem that blighted earlier Franco sex farces like *Celestine, An All Round Maid* (1974), *Les Chatouilleuses* (1974) and *Elles font tout* (1978). I don't know why Franco felt he could dispense with visual beauty or invention in his sex comedies: it suggests either an underlying lack of interest in the form, or some kind of problem with perception, as if by aiming for hilarity he takes his mind off visual aesthetics. Call it a failure of multi-tasking. Comic invention flows far more freely in Franco's genre parodies, such as the female crimefighter comedies *Sadisterotica* (1967) and *Kiss Me Monster* (1967), suggesting that for him wit is best conveyed in the corner of the eye: attempting to focus directly on comedy reveals a critical blind spot in his capabilities.

Cast and crew: Even the usually reliable Lina Romay is annoying here; she's meant to come across as free-spirited and coquettish, but her performance just grates, especially during an interminable scene in which she wiggles around in a short skirt singing an annoying ditty, while Mayans and Soler try to play tennis.

Music: Making frequent use of would-be comic jazz numbers (one of which, a mainstay of countless Franco films of the 1980s, is rendered even more annoying here by being sped up to twice the speed), *El hotel de los lligues* lacks even the lightest lawn-sprinkling of atmosphere. At least we get to hear Alain Petit's mid-seventies showstopper "La vie est une merde" again (a song dating back to *Midnight Party* in 1975).

Locations: Somewhere on the Costa de Sol.

Connections: The title is a play on *El hotel de los lligos* ('The Hotel of Messes'), which was the Spanish release title for the *Room Service* (1938) starring the Marx Brothers ... If you've ever wanted to hear Lina Romay deliver the "To be or not to be" soliloquy from *Hamlet*, well, here it is, complete with unamusing pornographic asides. The use of sex toys during the scene may be a first for the staging of this venerable classic of English theatre, but don't get your hopes up; 'The Erotic Rites of Shakespeare' it ain't. Perhaps if the dialogue had referred to 'the dildos and strap-ons of outrageous fortune' we might have been getting somewhere... On the fashion front, Romay is still wearing the hell out of the gold lamé blouse and matching thong seen in *Confesiones íntimas de exhibicionista* and *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, and Ida Balín has dug out her *Botas negras* gold lamé too ... The word 'mandonguera', used by some of the men as a term of endearment for Eva, is Catalan for 'meatball'.

MANSION OF THE LIVING DEAD

(English-language DVD cover title)

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-36.428-1982

Original theatrical title in country of origin

La mansión de los muertos vivientes

Alternative titles

Das Schloss der Reitenden Leichen (GER DVD)

The Castle of Horse-Riding Corpses

Mansion of the Living Dead – Die Residenz der reitenden Leichen (GER DVD cover)

Unconfirmed titles

Castle of the Living Dead [MF]

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributors

Laurenfilm, S.A. (Spain)

IMDb adds **Oris Films S.A.**

Timeline

Shooting date	circa September	1982
Depósito legal number	11 November	1982
Seville	13 July	1983
Barcelona	21 September	1983
Madrid	14 May	1984

Theatrical running time (reported)

Spain	97m
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DVD running time

US 'Severin' NTSC DVD	92m47s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music recording (in Dolby): **Audiofilms**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *Uncredited:* camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Candy). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Carlos Savonarola, the hotel manager). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Mamie Kaplan'] (Lea, the first victim). **Mabel Escaño** (Mabel, the second victim). **Elisa Vela** [as 'Jasmina Bell']

(Caty, the third victim). **Eva León** (Olivia, woman in captivity). **Albino Graziani** (Marleno, the gardener).

Synopsis: *Candy, Lea, Mabel and Caty, four topless waitresses from a bar in Munich, arrive at a hotel on Gran Canaria for a holiday. They find the place deserted except for two male staff; Carlo, a handsome but emotionally frigid man who claims to be the manager, and Marleno, a bad-tempered handyman. Deciding that they must have arrived during the off-season, and holiday-making crowds must be just out of sight on the next beach, the girls settle in. However, they begin to fear the worst when someone throws a knife at them from an upstairs balcony. Lea disappears after walking to a nearby monastery, and the other girls become frightened. Soon, only Candy is left. She discovers a female slave called Olivia tied up naked in one of the rooms who reveals that she's Carlo's plaything. Candy is browbeaten by Carlo into believing that she has great mystical significance in his religion; however once he has persuaded her to enter the monastery it emerges that she is to be sacrificed. We learn that the hotel has been closed for a long time, but Carlo occasionally advertises for guests, to be sacrificed to the Holy Order of which he is a deacon...*

Review: *Mansion of the Living Dead* is an eerie horror film that takes the scantily clad girls-in-peril formula of *Bloody Moon* and drops it, enjoyably if somewhat jarringly, into a weird story of sex slavery and supernatural zombies, with a passing thematic connection to the "Blind Dead" of Amando de Ossorio. Franco had expressed admiration for de Ossorio in 1976, when asked by an interviewer for *Vampir* magazine what he thought of contemporary Spanish horror: "Today the Spanish horror film is truly awful, in the truest sense of the word. [The Blind Dead films] are something of an exception. They were filmed by Amando de Ossorio, who I know very well, an intelligent man with great ideas. Very good at tricks and masks. The masks of the Templars are his own work. He has probably never had the means to make a really interesting film. In any case, the Templar films are among the rare Spanish horror films with beautiful settings, even if they're only partially perfect."¹

'Partially perfect' seems the ideal way of describing Franco's best work, and *Mansion* is a case in point: partly sinister and atmospheric, partly absurd and nonsensical. The Blind Dead masks that Franco so admired are here reduced to mere skulls, or men smeared with what looks like dirty shaving foam, and yet the sinister religious sect in the film (not Templars, but reminiscent of them) are thoroughly dreamlike and bizarre in a way that does indeed share a few horror beats with the Ossorio movies. *Mansion* is not to everyone's taste, but if you're looking for a horror film with intriguing shifts in tone this is a perfect example of Franco's tendency to take a sharp right or a sudden left just as you think you know where he's going. On one level *Mansion of the Living Dead* is about an undead Templar-style cult attacking sexy bathing beauties. On another level (like most of Franco's best work) it's about nothing tangible at all. Instead it meanders and digresses and seduces your attention with bizarre non-sequitur ellipses and

a faintly gothic, perversely peaceful ambience. It starts off like a slasher-movie, in which a giggling quartet of girls find themselves menaced by the creepy staff of a deserted hotel during a seaside holiday. There's sexual harassment, revealing thongs, and copious lesbian frolicking. A maniac tosses a meat-cleaver at the sunbathing heroines from a hotel window. If this were an American horror film we'd be on course for a loopy slasher plot featuring death by beach-ball, murder by deckchair, and poisonous jellyfish dropped into bikinis. But Franco soon abandons the format, and what follows carries the hallmark of his best work – a slow, sliding mood of mystery and unease.

It's easy to say that a film is like a dream, but there *is* something genuinely dreamlike about *Mansion of the Living Dead*. The girls arrive, all four of them chitter-chattering away about boys and sex and sunbathing, exuding the same goofy charm that the near-contemporary *Bloody Moon* bestows upon its female cast. They're so cheerful and self-absorbed that it takes them a while to realise that they've stumbled into a *Twilight Zone* episode – an empty hotel, deserted beaches, just a couple of creepy staff for company. The distinctly frosty hotel manager (a stand-out performance from Antonio Mayans) allots them two rooms, but they're at opposite ends of the hotel. "Can't we have rooms together?" one girl asks. "I'm sorry, all the others are taken," they're told. Franco uses this as a great excuse for some arty shots of empty corridors, his camera revelling in shadowy angles and disappearing perspectives. There's a curious artiness, too, in the way the hotel manager's insistence on splitting the girls into two groups turns them into mirror images of each other. Both couples view their counterparts as 'squares' ("They're a pair of sanctimonious nuns," smirks Candy to Caty about Mabel and Lea), yet both indulge in sapphic sex while sniggering that their friends would be shocked if they knew.

Mansion of the Living Dead is so strange you scarcely notice that the living dead are absent for much of the film. I imagine there are viewers for whom this is the ultimate cheat, because we only meet the monsters half-way through, and even then they're defiantly idiosyncratic, with few of the usual hallmarks. You just have to forget about zombies for a while, and enjoy the images of a deserted beach and seafront hotel, soaked in powerful Franco magic. This is not really a zombie film as such; there's no sense of social apocalypse, and it's not even focussed on death or the resurrection of the dead. It's far more concerned with the eeriness of a certain kind of space. When one of the girls, Lea, ventures out for a walk and finds herself traversing a bland yet somehow sinister scrubland, half-way between hotel developments and the countryside, we're carried into an unmarked, liminal zone, the spatial equivalent of an unfinished sentence. Franco's camera delights in these nowhere-spots, repeatedly peering down a path, for instance, that runs alongside the hotel towards the sea. There's something 'off-limits' and unfinished about it (bringing to mind all those scare stories about expensive hotels which look great in brochures but turn out to be still under construction). Such places offer Franco a vista without tourists and passers-by, but they

also reveal a borderline, a threshold, reverberating with obscure menace. Wobbling around on the volcanic rocks of Gran Canaria in high heels and hot pants, walking past palm trees tossed this way and that by howling sea winds, poor Lea is like a character from a tacky-but-fun American slasher film like *Slumber Party Massacre* who's stumbled off the set into entirely the wrong sort of movie. Franco doesn't care about audience expectation; he's doing his own thing. What you get are a few trappings from the horror genre strewn around the periphery of a largely abstract film. For instance, after much traversing of the mysterious no-man's land, Lea's encounter with the living dead takes place offscreen! Viewers looking for thrills will find this incredibly annoying, but for me Lea's journey provides what a gory punchline cannot; a dreamlike sense of narrative petering out into obscurity, characters getting lost between worlds, a place where loose ends and fragments take precedence over logical development.

Idiosyncrasies abound elsewhere too, for instance in a hotel corridor sex scene between Mabel Escaño and Antonio Mayans. The sudden departure of the latter, breaking off mid-cunnilingus and disentangling himself from Escaño's snatch with the immortal words, "*My gosh, it's 4 o'clock! I've got to feed a sick woman. Can I see you tomorrow?*" again recalls the (intentionally?) bizarre *Bloody Moon*. There's memorably absurd dialogue for minor characters too, like the vastly unhelpful hotel employee played by Albino Graziani who refuses to make coffee for the girls, snapping: "*Where do you think you are, New York or something? This is a democracy, and in a democracy no one drinks coffee. We all drink whiskey!*" It sounds exactly like the sort of line you'd write down after hearing it in a dream...

Mansion of the Living Dead leaves the American slasher genre definitively behind when it's revealed that Carlo the hotel manager keeps a female sex slave, nude except for black stockings, chained to the wall in one of the rooms. The sudden shock of this sado-sexual plot development, a total non-sequitur yet so *very* Jess Franco, lifts us away into something weirder and darker. Asked by her captor what she desires, the woman, called Olivia, responds with a request for food, more stockings, and a chamber pot. "*You're more like an animal every day. You eat, you shit,*" sneers Carlo. Further dialogue contradicts our understanding of what's going on; we realise that the woman is in some kind of sadomasochistic relationship with her captor. Her demeanour is subservient but accommodating too, without the hatred or raw fear of a true abductee. Can we be sure what's going on? Not really. We're simply confronted by this bizarre relationship with no indication of how it all started, or for how long the woman has been tied up. As for what on Earth it has to do with the rest of the plot, well your guess is as good as mine. It's rather as if we've taken a wrong turn in the empty corridors of the hotel and emerged in a neighbouring Franco production, which makes the setting of a labyrinthine off-season hotel a good image for the entirety of Franco's cinema. "*I'll leave you like that, with a burning desire, trembling, like a cat in heat,*" spits Carlo, after screwing the woman for just a few seconds. It's a disturbing scene, comical yet

vicious, and fraught with overtones of madness and perversion. Franco throws more curveballs during a long dialogue scene between Olivia and Candy when the latter discovers the chained woman in one of the rooms. "*I love him, and I hate him,*" Olivia says when quizzed about her captive. She claims that when Carlo takes her sexually it's the only time she experiences total bliss – except, of course, from her rare visits outside to pee on the grass. It's a sustained tour-de-force by Eva León as Olivia that manages to be sad, comical, frightening and repulsive at the same time. Watching her apply make-up while her face is still smeared with the food she's hastily gobbled down, and seeing her primp and smile and wipe sauce off her cheeks with her forearms, we feel pity, disgust and amazement; what manner of filmmaker is it who shows us such things, and then has the heroine, Candy, leave the poor wretch tied up, with neither woman even *mentioning* the possibility of escape? The obvious conclusion of the scene would be for Candy to at least *try* to rescue her! Franco simply lets the scene unfold then moves on. As I said, a truly dreamlike film...

The weird non-sequiturs that trail from the plot, the lack of storytelling closure, the sense of erasure, as if salient details have been swallowed up by the hotel's prevalence of empty space, turn what could have been a tangle of nonsense into something mysterious and marvellous. *Mansion of the Living Dead* has a shifting abstract quality, a 'creamininess' if you will, a feeling of both richness and emptiness. There's a sensual fluidity to the texture and mood, yet it springs from a story in which both darkest horror and abject frivolity interweave. One of Franco's most mood-altering movies, it's a foam caress from a seaside ghost – luxurious, ephemeral, transparent – which, when pulled apart, dissolves into air...

Music: Refreshingly, Franco abstains from the same Daniel White compositions he's been drawing upon for the past two years. Instead he concentrates on one piece of music, used here for the first and last time, a marvellous waft of decaying ambience made of heavily phased chorale, probably created on a Mellotron (a keyboard invented in the 1960s, used by The Beatles, King Crimson and The Moody Blues, which plays tape loops of other instruments). To this, Franco adds a sound which often resonates through his films, a sound to which I sometimes think they could all be condensed, a perfect distillation of mood in which the real merges with the fantastical: a keening whistling wind, so haunting that it's hard to say if it's real or synthetic.

Locations: The hotel where the girls stay is called the Sun Club Aguila Playa, and it's on Calle de los Pinos in San Bartolomé de Tirajana, on the island of Gran Canaria. The beach location is directly beside the hotel. The monastery is actually an ex-convent near to Las Palmas, Gran Canaria.

Connections: It takes quite a while for *Mansion of the Living Dead* to unveil its titular monsters, and like so much in Franco's cinema they will drastically divide opinion. Many will find these peculiar 'ghouls' risible beyond tolerance. Personally, I could not disagree more. Franco's denizens of the beyond resemble the ghostly hordes from his 1972 marvel *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*

and they owe little if anything to the Italian or American zombies of the day. With so many zombie films repeating what had already been done, is it not a pleasure to find oneself startled by such weird one-offs? This heretical offshoot of the living dead tradition identify themselves as Cathars, who fittingly were themselves an heretical religious formation emerging in the 12th century from the Languedoc region of France (where *Lorna... the Exorcist* was filmed) before being stamped out by the Catholic Inquisition. The Cathars shared many beliefs with Gnosticism, including the notion that the material world was created not by God but by a lesser being, a demiurge, who in some cases is explicitly merged with Satan. Essentially an attempt to answer one of the biggest challenges to Monotheism, the so-called 'problem of evil', the Gnostics decided that a Devil must have made the world, which explains the widespread presence of wickedness and suffering. Meanwhile the God of Love remains safely out of the frame, beckoning mystics to an incorporeal realm of love beyond the toils of earthly woe. The Cathars' dualistic belief in a complete split between physical and spiritual existence extended as far as renouncing the Eucharist as sacrilegious, and asserting the impossibility of the Son of God being born of mortal flesh. They even refused to venerate the Cross, the physicality of which was deemed impure. However the adepts we meet in *Mansion of the Living Dead* seem to have got their dualisms in a twist: "You are kneeling before the holy court of the Cathar, that of the saintly men with a white habit and a black soul," says one. "Damn you and bless you. Bless you and damn you," says another. Partaking impassively of carnal acts with screaming female victims, it seems that sex for these accursed men is alright as long as you don't enjoy it. Pious prayers like "Protect these servants so that they may not draw any pleasure while carrying out this sinner's sentence" and "Oh Father forgive me for having felt pleasure" make it clear that ecstasy is the enemy, and therefore they spring from the verso of Franco's cinema, the flipside of his taste for untrammelled desire.

Unlike this weird and perverted bunch, the historical Cathars were stringently opposed to killing, even expressing their opposition, unusual at the time, to capital punishment and war. Murder as punishment for sins of the flesh was simply not their style. The higher ranked Cathars were expected to live ascetic lives, but the followers were not. Indeed marriage itself was frowned upon because Catharism forbade the swearing of oaths. More radically still, while sex itself was not prohibited, procreation was heavily discouraged (which gave rise to charges of sexual perversion from furious Christians). Essentially, if the ghouls in *Mansion of the Living Dead* are indeed Cathars, they are as heretical to Cathar beliefs as the Cathars were to Catholicism! How typical of Franco to create a heresy within a heresy...

In interviews Franco cited the Spanish writer Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer as an influence on the film. Two of Bécquer's stories in particular seem to have influenced *Mansion of the Living Dead*: "La cruz del diablo" aka "The Devil's Cross" (written in 1860 and loosely adapted for the screen by ex-Hammer director John Gilling in 1975) and "El monte de las ánimas" aka "The Spirits'

Mountain", written in 1861. In "La cruz del diablo" a vicious Count who delights in torture and murder is finally set upon by local villagers and murdered, leaving only his fearsome suit of armour in the ruins of his castle. Some time afterwards, rumours abound that someone or something has taken up residence at his castle:

"Amid the shadows in the distance, now climbing the steep, twisting paths of the crag of the Segre, now wandering among the ruins of the castle, now seeming to oscillate in the air, mysterious and fantastic lights were seen gliding, crossing, vanishing and reappearing to recede in different directions – lights whose source no one could explain [...] Now no doubt remained. A band of evildoers were harboring in the dungeons of the castle [...] Assassinations multiplied; young girls disappeared and children were snatched from their cradles despite the lamentations of their mothers to furnish those diabolical feasts at which, it was generally believed, the sacramental vessels stolen from the profaned churches were used as goblets. Terror took such possession of men's souls that, when the bell rang for the Angelus, nobody dared to leave his house..."

And in Bécquer's "The Spirits' Mountain", a young man in love with his cousin is goaded by her scornful indifference to retrieve a scarf that she has lost, a course of action that involves venturing into the haunted hills on All Saints Eve, despite the warnings and folk tales he hears:

*"Very soon the Angelus will sound in the monastery of the Knight Templars, and the souls of the dead will commence to toll their bell in the chapel on the mountain [...] They say that, some time after this event, a hunter who, having lost his way, had been obliged to pass the Night of the Dead on the Spirits' Mountain, and who in the morning before he died, was able to relate what he had seen, told a tale of horror. Among the awful sights, he avowed he beheld the skeletons of the ancient Knights Templars and of the nobles of Soria, buried in the cloister of the chapel, rise at the hour of the Angelus with a horrible rattle and, mounted on their bony steeds, chase, as a wild beast, a beautiful woman, pallid, with streaming hair, who uttering cries of terror and anguish, had been wandering, with bare and bloody feet, about the tomb of Alonzo..."*²

Meanwhile, *Mansion of the Living Dead* refers to an accursed Decalogue (in other words, a book containing an alternative ten commandments), which came into the holy order's hands thanks to a ploy of their founder. This passing reference suggests that our undead heretics have been corrupted by a malign occult text – a 'Necronomicon' if you will...

When Carlos addresses Candy at the holy order's chapel, his words suggest that this cheery blonde bimbo may in fact be an altogether different woman, a creature of mystery, an immortal with supernatural powers: "I recognised your soul, your body, when I first saw you. You're Irina, returning from the past to liberate me from my curse..." So could Candy be one of the reincarnations of the Countess Irina, as first encountered in 1973's *La comtesse noire*? The face is the same, even if she's gained a few pounds. Perhaps part of her malediction is to live many lives, from the exalted to the lowly; sometimes a rich and powerful Madeiran noblewoman, sometimes a poor stripper from the tower blocks of Munich...

LA SOMBRA DEL JUDOKA CONTRA EL DR. WONG

(Spanish theatrical title)

translation: *The Shadow Judoka Versus Dr. Wong*

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-36.429-1982

Alternative title

La sombra del judoka (depósito legal registration title)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Unreleased theatrically

Timeline

Shooting date	circa September	1982
Depósito legal number	11 November	1982
Screened on Spanish TV	07 July	1996

Intended theatrical running time

Spain 86m

Video running time (converted)

SP TV transmission (from PAL source) 85m35s

writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. director of photography/camera operator: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music recording: Regson. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Daniel Katz**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **José Llamas** [as 'Bruce Lyn'] (Bruce). **Lina Romay** (Mari). **Albino Graziani** (Spencer). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Lia Kaplan'] (Ojos de Miel). **Polly Kuan** [as 'Tasai Pan'] (Tsai Chin). **Daniel Katz** (Philip Morris). **Jess Franco** (Dr. Wong).

Synopsis: *Dr. Wong, a shadowy drug-lord involved in heroin trafficking, sends his gang of heavies to eliminate an enemy called Mr. Jung. Jung is murdered, but Wong has reckoned without a martial arts student of Jung's called Bruce Lyn (José Llamas) who vows revenge for Jung's death. In order to achieve his vengeance, Bruce must summon a supernatural karate spirit called 'The Shadow of Judoka'. Meanwhile, Mari and Philip Morris, two British Secret Service agents, are sent to investigate. Wong is also engaged in a battle with Macedo, a rival*

gangster in the same line of business. Learning of Bruce's sworn mission, he sends his thugs to ambush him. Bruce is saved by Mari and Philip. Wong deploys his female associate, the beautiful Honey-Eyes, to prepare a trap. After various scrapes and adventures, it transpires that the so-called secret agents are actually two corrupt millionaires who intend to steal the ship's cargo of heroin for their own wicked ends. Bruce Lyn stops them, but recalls the guidance of his teacher on the subject of mercy: after chastising the terrified couple, he lets them go free.

Review: *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* resurrects the long-forgotten Monogram Pictures' 'Yellow-Peril' character Dr. Wong (no subpoenas please), an archetypal Oriental villain played in this instance by Jess Franco himself. The result, achieved on ninepence, is a *very* minor hoot for Franco watchers with a hell of a lot of tolerance for aimless larking about – and unwatchable fluff for anyone else. Unreleased theatrically, *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* is as irksome and ungainly as its title, and thoroughly deserves its obscurity. Those who criticise Franco's late 1960s Fu-Manchu films would perhaps feel more generously disposed towards them if they were first made to sit through this serving of phony Orientalism from the penny-pinching Golden Films period. The end result asks much of our credulity while offering little in terms of either sex, violence or action. No more than a plate of half-baked 'chop-socky' clichés, it's about as appetising as, well, a stale Chinese food metaphor.

The adventure boom that swept through European exploitation cinema after the horror bubble burst in the early 1980s tended to show up the limitations of low budget filmmaking in high relief, so when you consider that Franco had a tenth of the money available to Italian exploitation directors like Antonio Margheriti or Lucio Fulci, it's no wonder the results look so threadbare. Understanding this doesn't make watching the films any easier though, and it's obvious that Franco had no strategy for bringing the genre within his means. In his ultra-low-budget horror films there is at least a strange, dislocated atmosphere that dovetails perfectly with the genre's dispensation to disturb the viewer. Horrific images and eerie moods are natural bedfellows, so even if your special effects budget is minuscule you can always lean more heavily on the latter. But what to do when a martial arts action film can't afford any action? What new element can be substituted? What background detail expanded? Behind the action of an action film there lies only scenery. Franco has nothing to offer but dialogue, and I think it's fair to say that few of his films stand on their writerly merits. Despite his signature wind effects whistling away in the background, the sound that spoke of magic and mystery in *Mansion of the Living Dead* is here just the cold breeze of poverty whistling through the empty spaces vacated by the genre's essentials. One could argue that this makes for an odd alienated sensation, and it's true that to a point we're seeing action-film characters abandoned by their genre, high and dry, like fish washed onto a beach. But if, as the moribund *Kiss Me*

Killer proved in 1973, it was impossible to make a decent action movie on a Eurociné budget, it's positively nuts to attempt it on Emilio Larraga's money.

Among the cast, José Llamas gives it his best shot, even though his karate skills would appear to have been hastily attained during a weekend crash course at the nearest dojo. He's certainly good-looking enough to play a Bruce Lee style hero, even if he does have to wear ridiculous make-up appliances to simulate Japanese eyelids (what *is* this thing called political correctness?). The rest of the cast wander through the film without enthusiasm: Romay (dark-haired for the first time since *La noche de los sexos abiertos*) is wasted, and seems temperamentally unengaged; Albino Graziani grizzles without necessarily acting; only Daniel Katz comes off well, playing the part of a shady smuggler with all the smarm of a young James Woods. If you're in a generous mood you can admire the way Franco merges his own footage with borrowed clips from Japanese sources (see below), but having worked so long for Eurociné he was no stranger to the notion. As for the rest of this trudge through the boondocks of tedium, it's best to perform a swift blocking manoeuvre and move on.

Franco on screen: Franco takes the plum role of cut-price criminal mastermind Dr. Wong. It's a decision for which we must be grateful, because seeing him playing a naff Oriental Bond villain like something from a 1970s *Two Ronnies* sketch is the most memorable aspect of the film.

Music: A cheap, woozily detuned synthesiser drifting into quarter-tones represents the mysteries of the East. The result is a little bit like music, and a little bit like shoving bamboo spikes in your ears. Perhaps this is what they mean by 'Chinese Torture'?

Locations: The Canary Islands.

Connections: A Golden Films release opening with scenes of rush-hour commuter crowds and bustling subways? How can this be? That's the question that crosses the Franco veteran's mind as *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* begins. After all, Franco's 'Golden Films' generally seem to operate in a depopulated limbo with a cast of five or six and no extras; a crowd scene stands out like an erect penis in a Spielberg movie. However, all is eventually explained when we realise that Franco has simply incorporated footage from at least two different Asian films, one of which Franco scholar Robert Monell has identified as *Seven to One* (Hau Chang, 1973) featuring the actress Polly Kuan (credited as Chin Tai in the Franco film). Franco has simply taken a leaf out of Eurociné's little red book of exploitation and edited in footage from an unrelated older movie... The title alludes to *The Mysterious Mr. Wong*, a 1934 film starring Bela Lugosi, and/or *Mr. Wong in Chinatown*, a 1939 film starring Boris Karloff ... *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* sees Daniel Katz join the Franco acting troupe for the first of ten roles ... In a film that takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to the 'Yellow Peril', can it be entirely a coincidence that so many shots have the nearby Sanyo Corporation offices visible in the background (such mega-corporations being far more of a threat than puny drug smugglers)?

GEMIDOS DE PLACER

(Spanish theatrical title) translation: *Cries of Pleasure*

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-38.209-1982

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Laurenfilm, S.A. (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa October	1982
Depósito legal number	25 November	1982
Seville	16 April	1983
Barcelona	18 July	1983
Madrid	23 September	1983
Murcia	30 January	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain 86m

DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Cine Español' PAL DVD 85m35s

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] & **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Antonio). **Lina Romay** (Julia). **Rocío Freixas** (Martina). **Elisa Vela** [as 'Jasmina Bell'] (Marta). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Fenul).

Synopsis: *Antonio brings his mistress Julia to stay at his luxury villa in the hills overlooking Alicante. He introduces her to Fenul, his retarded manservant, and Marta, his maid. Marta reveals to Julia that she is in love with Antonio, and feels jealous every time he brings a woman back to the house. Julia and Antonio make love, during which Antonio obsessively discusses his plan to murder his wife Martina, a schizophrenic nymphomaniac who's due to return from a four year incarceration at a sanatorium later that day. He secures Julia's promise to help him commit the crime, but when Martina arrives she swiftly exerts her own malign influence. After Antonio, Martina and Julia get to know each other by raping and murdering Marta, and Julia sinks into drugged dislocation during the night, the stage is set for a shift in allegiances...*

Review: *Gemidos de placer* is a triumphant return to Sadean territory, a bold, experimental film that takes the pressure-cooker ambience and amoral game-playing of 1973's *Plaisir à trois* and shoots it in the style of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. A stylish and chilling slice of horror-erotica, made very cheaply with a cast of five at a single location, it's easily his most compelling exercise in minimalist aesthetics and therefore one of the most fascinating films of his career.

What distinguishes *Gemidos de placer* from Franco's previous Sade adaptations is its unusual structural conceit: the entire film consists of fewer than fifty shots, massively fewer than average for a ninety-minute feature. This deliberate technical restriction throws Franco's style into high relief, and shows him turning the limitations under which he works to his advantage. Often berated for his 'careless' use of the zoom lens, here he creates a film jam-packed with zooms that are not only aesthetically credible but totally indispensable. Given that *Gemidos de placer* uses only a fraction of the edits one normally associates with commercial cinema, movement and visual interest must be sustained by other means: through choreography of the actors, frequent hand-held panning to follow motion, and yes, the zoom, used over and over, to find alternative ways of framing the action, or to scrutinise faces in close-up. Composed entirely of tableau shots, zooms, and slow lateral movements to amplify the caresses and contortions of the actors, the film is a spellbinding display of Franco's ability to make the camera an erotic component of the action.

It's intriguing to see how Franco deals with his chosen restriction. For instance, less cutting means there are limits to where the camera can move if one is to avoid casting shadows. With so few edits there's no chance to move the lights, which have to be set in place at the start of the shot. Consequently, the physical location of the camera in the room remains fixed, with movement created instead by zooming, or panning left to right, back and forth, up and down, in various combinations. That such a sinuous, mesmerising film can flourish within such constraints is quite remarkable, and displays Franco's style in its purest, most accomplished form. From the very first shot, the technique pays off. A slow zoom reveals a man playing guitar by an open-air swimming pool, perched on a fence overlooking the beautiful seaside resort of Alicante; as the camera zooms out we see another man floating face down in the pool. The shot lasts two and a half minutes, and it's followed by another of similar length in which Antonio, our would-be Sadean protagonist, arrives home with his mistress Julia to be greeted by Marta the family maid. The process of getting Julia indoors while Antonio wanders by the pool tormenting his mute servant Fenul makes full use of the film's formal concept, as the comings and goings are conveyed by a restlessly panning and peering camera, taking in the architecture of the magnificent villa and exploring the spatial relationships between the characters. Each shot offers new challenges, whether dialogue scenes in rooms partitioned by windows and interior doors, or sex scenes taking place in semi-darkness. The structure of the editing allows for clusters of shots

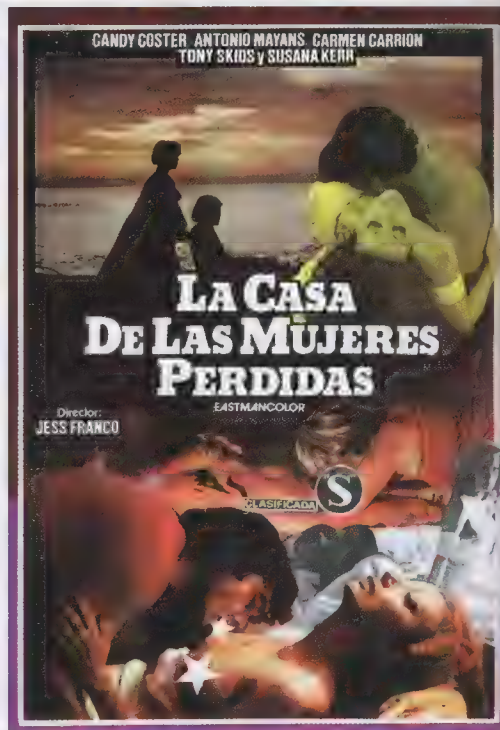
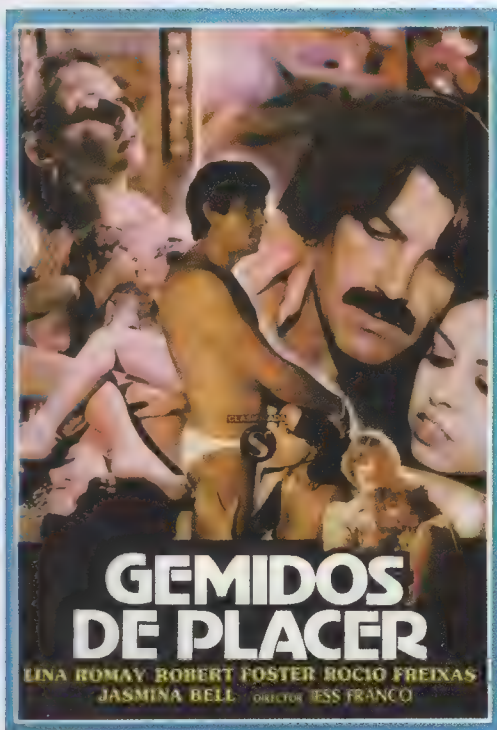
here and there, but these are gathered evenly throughout the film; at any given point the pacing and rhythm remains consistent: for instance, there is no great flurry of shots at the climax. Of approximately forty-five individual shots, twelve are extremely long, with the shorter ones dotted in between. The longest shots tend to focus on disturbing and mesmeric sexual encounters, and of these it's worth singling out two particular examples.

In the first, which lasts for seven minutes, Antonio holds down Marta while Julia gnaws the woman's vagina and Martina slices the victim's breasts and face with an open razor. It's one of the most frankly Sadean scenes of cruelty Franco has ever filmed. The fact that the woman is mutilated during an ongoing sexual encounter, while the camera peers and probes through an open doorway, gives the scene a startling voyeuristic intensity. In the second example, lasting six minutes, we see Julia, who's been drugged in the aftermath of the murder, reclining nude by an open window, convulsing protractedly as if experiencing an elongated involuntary climax. It's a beautiful but disturbing sequence, illuminated by moonlight and suffused with a feeling of loneliness and sexual dysfunction. Her convulsions attract the ever-horny Antonio and Martina, who ravish her as she twitches. This scene, without dialogue, shrouded in midnight shadows and baited-breath mood, takes Franco's perennial visual motif of the writhing woman and bestows it with both mystery and perverse beauty. Are Julia's convulsions caused by drugs administered to her secretly, or is she having a fit brought on by the murder in which she so willingly participated earlier? Franco's gentle, insistent camerawork draws out the question and spins it, spider-like, into abstract visual poetry.

Gemidos de placer would probably rank as one of the most disturbing films in Franco's long career if he'd been willing to show violence more graphically. Gore, however, is not on the menu. Instead, he serves up one of his prime stylistic specialties: the sex scene that plays like a drug-soaked nightmare. Marta doesn't scream the place down as she's slashed by the razor: her cries are muted, drowsy, stifled. This is not because she's been drugged – her acquiescence to murder simply stems from Franco's preference for low-intensity violence and high intensity weirdness. As Martina slashes Marta's throat we see no blood at all, and Franco concedes only a couple of smears on the victim's breasts. Essential to our appreciation of the film is a total commitment to the underlying rhythm. The viewer must surrender and let Franco dictate the speed and flow of visual information. If you can make this leap, reducing one's insistence on the visual spectacle of violence and turning instead to the abstract pleasures of pacing and mood, *Gemidos de placer* belongs in the same category of excellence as *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Lorna... the Exorcist*, *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*, *Shining Sex*, *Eugénie*, *historia de una perversion*, *Macumba Sexual* and *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, films which use horror and eroticism to explore the elastic, subjective nature of time.

There are two modes of address in the film, dialogue and sex, with sex by far the more expressive. The characters have little to say





to each other; their exchanges are mostly functional, the minimum required to achieve their intentions. Sex is all that Antonio cares about, and he's found two women, Julia and Martina, who share his erotic tunnel-vision. There are times here when sex feels suffused with sadistic or aggressive joy, and other times when it's more like a purgatorial rite, obsessively repeated but forever failing to deliver an 'ultimate' experience. Eroticism as magnificent folly or hellish treadmill. The villa in which the story takes place is situated on a cliffside overlooking a magnificent ocean bay, with a beautiful rocky coastline below, but the view is wasted on the characters: they never show an interest in the wider world, in fact they scarcely seem to belong to it. Isolated on their picturesque hillside, these blinkered sensualists might as well live in a dark subterranean cave for all the connection they have with their surroundings.

The horror of *Gemidos de placer* is subtle, not entirely to do with the outbursts of sadism or sexual frenzy; it's more to do with the emptiness that lurks behind the rarefied pleasure of sex-crime. The moral of the story is that pleasure-seeking amorality brings forth loneliness under the guise of total freedom. Lust and violence in Franco's cinema are haunted by an implacable void which demands ever more acts of obedience. The insatiable urge to fuck, to torture, to kill, turns out to be a nightmare for the perpetrator too. Meanwhile pleasure shades into paroxysms indistinguishable from sickness. Love, loyalty, friendship, trust, are qualities surrendered and lost. This is the theme picked up from *Plaisir à trois*, in which a murderer learns that love between sadists is an illusion; that greater pleasure comes from betrayal. With this in mind as the credits roll, the outlook for the survivors is grim...

Franco on screen: Franco does not appear onscreen, but he dubs the simple-minded manservant Fenul.

Music: The vast majority of *Gemidos de placer*'s wonderful score is drawn from Daniel White's excellent library LP *Mystère Bleuté* (1976). The opening credits feature the sombre and mysterious solo string bass piece called "Basse profonde"; Romay descends an outdoor spiral staircase to the strains of "Bonjour Tendresse"; she suffers a seizure in the night to "Pluie Sur Bergen"; a nocturnal threesome unfolds to the accompaniment of "Fantomes cheri"; Fenul discovers a corpse as we hear "Du Fond D'une Prison"; and a less than cheerful lesbian clinch gains added pathos from "Quatuor A Weimar". Other musical elements are drawn from previous films like *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, *La noche de los sexos abiertos* and *Shining Sex*. Along with *Macumba Sexual*, it's one of the most exciting 'total sound' experiences in Franco's cinema.

Locations: The villa, which is sometimes reported to have belonged to the film's executive producer but was actually hired just for the shoot, is located in Calpe, near Alicante. It looks directly across the bay towards the Peñón de Ifach.

Connections: To what extent is it true to say this is "Based on a story by the Marquis De Sade"? While the overall situation has echoes of Sade, there is no specific story from which the narrative is derived. As noted, it's actually a variation on Franco's earlier Sade-

inspired tale *Plaisir à trois*, a distillation of a derivation resulting in something more personal ... "He raped me when I was 12. Since then I've never stopped loving him," says Marta, adding yet another controversial layer to Franco's treatment of sexual abuse (see *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* and *Las orgias inconfesables de Emmanuelle*).

LOS BLUES DE LA CALLE POP

(AVENTURAS DE FELIPE MALBORO, VOLUMEN 8)

(SP theatrical title)

Pop Street Blues (Adventures of Felipe Malboro, Volume 8)

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-28.007-1983

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Unreleased theatrically in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Murcia or Cartagena.

Timeline

Shooting date	summer	1982
Depósito legal number	07 September	1983

Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
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Video and DVD running times (converted)

SP 'Cine Español' PAL DVD	86m56s
SP 'Galan Video' PAL VHS	87m05s

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'José Antonio Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. editor: **David Raposo**. music: **Fernando Garcia Morcillo & Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. titles and truca: **Capricornio Uno**. Fujicolor. *Uncredited:* producer: **Jess Franco**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Felipe Malboro). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Genara Winston, aka Butterfly). **Trino Trives** (Saul Winston, drug dealer). **María del Mar Sánchez** [as 'Mary Sad'] (Mary Lucky). **José Llamas** (Macho Jim). **Agustín García** (Impasible Carter). **Analía Ivars** (Macho Jim's punkette girlfriend). **Jess Franco** (Sam Chesterfield, a

pianist). **Juana de la Morena** (María Eugenia, aka 'Golfá', punk woman in hotel room next to Malboro's). **Ricardo Palacios** (Narrator – voice only). **José Miguel García Marfa** (Pepeta's drug-dealing friend).

Synopsis: *Shit City*, a place of luxury and vice on the East Coast. Mary Lucky, a young woman from Mondoñedo, Ohio, hires the famous detective Felipe Malboro to find her boyfriend Macho Jim, who disappeared three months earlier. In return, she promises Felipe money and her body as well. In *Shit City* punk gangs rule, under the orders of Saúl Winston, the owner of the city's largest gambling house. Malboro pays a visit to Sam Chesterfield, a blues pianist friend, who tells him that Macho Jim has become a punk and is a drug dealing pimp who hangs around with a Pepet Spencer and his gang at a motel on Santa Cruz Street. Outside Sam's bar, as Macho Jim and his friends watch, Malboro is beaten by a gang whose leader is an enigmatic Flamenco dancer nicknamed Impasible Carter. Macho Jim tells Malboro to get out of town. Ignoring the warning, Malboro visits the Santra Cruz Street motel looking for Pepet Spencer: in fact the person is a woman called Pepeta Spencer, who tells Malboro that Macho Jim has disappeared and invites him to check the missing boy's room. There, Malboro finds cocaine but when he insults a flatmate friend of Jim's he gets a kicking and is thrown out of the motel. He goes to meet with Mary at a hotel. She tells him that Macho Jim was seduced by Winston's wife Butterfly, an uninhibited nightclub dancer. Tailing Butterfly and Winston's car after a show, Felipe ends up at their villa outside town, where he learns about their unhappy marital life. He also glimpses Macho Jim in the villa's whereabouts. Back at Sam's bar, the pianist helps Felipe survive an ambush set up by Carter and Macho Jim. Malboro chases Macho Jim through town, but ends up facing Butterfly, who offers him five thousand dollars to drop his investigation. They become lovers. When Sam is savagely beaten to death by Carter's gang, the detective swears to avenge him. He forces Carter to dance the flamenco, then shoots him in cold blood. When he goes after Macho Jim, though, Felipe finds out that Butterfly has dispatched him: but she in turn gets shot by one of Jim's lovers, a punk girl, and dies in Felipe's arms. Winston escapes aboard his personal plane, which crashes to the ground seconds after taking off. Malboro returns to his hotel where Mary Ocky is waiting for him. She reveals that she knew all along about Butterfly and Macho Jim, and her only aim was revenge. She pays him the rest of his fee – that is, they make love. However, Mary too is killed by Macho Jim's friend. Felipe is about to call the police but the pretty killer begs him to give her one last night of love. Felipe gladly obliges.

Production notes: By now, Franco was working almost constantly: prepping, shooting and editing in a whirl of activity, happily churning out movies faster than Golden Films could market them. As long as he kept on working, the money to pay for production was there every time. However, getting any royalties from theatrical releases proved a lot more difficult, something which Franco and Antonio Mayans discovered when they began to enquire about the profits that ought to have been pouring in. Consequently, as the

relationship with Golden Films soured, Franco diverted projects away from them and revived his own production company, Manacoa Films, a trading moniker he'd last used for a pair of thrillers from the early seventies, *Un silencio de tumba* (1972) and *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* (1973) and the Italian release of *Women Behind Bars* (1975). Although chronology is difficult during this feverish period of production, the first Manacoa film of the 1980s appears to have been *Los blues de la calle Pop* (*Aventuras de Felipe Malboro*, volumen 8), which judging by Antonio Mayans's clean-shaven appearance was probably shot in late 1982 (he wore a thick beard for much of 1983, cut down to a moustache in the Fall of 1983 and throughout 1984). For the next three years another eight Manacoa productions turned up, either in Spanish theatres or straight to video: *Camino solitario* (1983), *Las chicas del tanga* (1983), *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espía?* (1984), *Fuego sucio en Casablanca* (1984), *La chica de los labios rojos* (1984), *Bahía blanca* (1985), *La esclava blanca* (1985), *Las últimas de Filipinas* (1985) and *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido* (1985). In addition, three unfinished or unreleased films – *El asesino llevada medias negras* (1984), *Voces de muerte* (1984) and *Gentes del río* (1984) – were also apparently Manacoa productions.

Review: *Los blues de la calle Pop* is a pulp-noir detective story that flits between comedy, tragedy and outright parody. Franco affects a sardonic directorial posture, playing the genre game while undercutting its clichés. Although less overtly comedic than his knockabout spy parody *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1966), or the Red Lips films *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster* (shot back-to-back in 1967), *Los blues de la calle Pop* nevertheless adopts a similar amused/detached approach, influenced once again by Jean-Luc Godard's meta-genre pastiches of the 1960s. In terms of mise-en-scène and use of colour, its closest neighbour in the Franco canon is *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* (1982), however the peculiar character names ('Macho Jim', 'Impasible Carter', 'Felipe Malboro'), copious movie references (a pianist called Sam, cutaways to bar-room pictures of Bogart, Marilyn and Kinski's Nosferatu), punk costumes, and hardboiled noir voice-over (by an uncredited Ricardo Palacios) generate a more turbulent sense of irony than the relatively straightforward noir styling of that film.

The opening credits play over a painting depicting Manhattan by night. In conjunction with the voice-over, this implies that we should read the setting, 'Shit City', as a punk re-imagining of the American metropolis. Film-noir stories tended to unfold, by and large, in the concrete underworlds of the USA: thus 'Shit City', so the script would have us believe, is a sleazy resort on the American East Coast. But having triggered these cultural associations, Franco makes no attempt whatsoever to maintain the illusion of an American setting. Instead, the film is predicated on a bathetic shortfall between the stylistic topography of film noir and the tacky tourist destination in which the story actually unfolds: Benidorm, on the Costa del Sol! Rather than trying to simulate America, Franco deliberately incorporates shots revealing the true location; at one point he cuts directly to a neon sign boasting "Benidorm's

West End”, deliberately contradicting the script and its references to Ohio and Santa Cruz. (The sign itself is alluding to *London’s* West End entertainment hub; much of Benidorm’s tourist trade is slanted towards the kind of British holidaymaker who refuses to venture abroad without English pubs and good old fish and chips. In effect, what we get is a fake within a fake: a film masquerading as American noir, set in a Spanish resort masquerading as London.)

Genre satire aside, there are some lovely visual flourishes here and there. Some are simply decorative: for instance, when Malboro searches a suspect’s apartment, a light fixture flares rainbow patterns into the camera lens, a dazzling effect which recurs several times throughout the film. Other examples more clearly define the film’s moral scenario. A conversation conveyed to us by inverted reflection in a polished glass table prefigures a character’s duplicitous motivations, Romay’s admission of guilt after murdering a key character is bathed in a suitably incriminating red light, and when femme fatale Mary Lucky (Sánchez) gazes at Malboro through the rim of a whiskey glass, held to the camera for an Argento-esque subjective shot, the baroque visual contrivance is an expression of her amorality and boredom with the ‘trivialities’ of murder. A lovemaking scene between Mayans and Romay is backlit exquisitely, with the edges of faces and bodies picked out by coronas of illumination. Uncommonly for Franco, what is being expressed here is the tenderness of the encounter; the lighting adumbrates the sensitivity of two bodies brimming with erotic energy. Elsewhere, Franco carefully positions Felipe Malboro in a way that symbolises his failings as a sleuth: Mary Lucky is introduced to us standing beside a mirror, the doubling of her image suggesting, in classic noir style, that she is someone we should keep an eye on. Meanwhile, in the same composition, we see Malboro standing by the shuttered window, gazing out through the gaps in the wooden slats. So much for the virtues of deduction: his position within the frame suggests a man who doesn’t try very hard, who misses vital information, and has only a very limited view of the world.

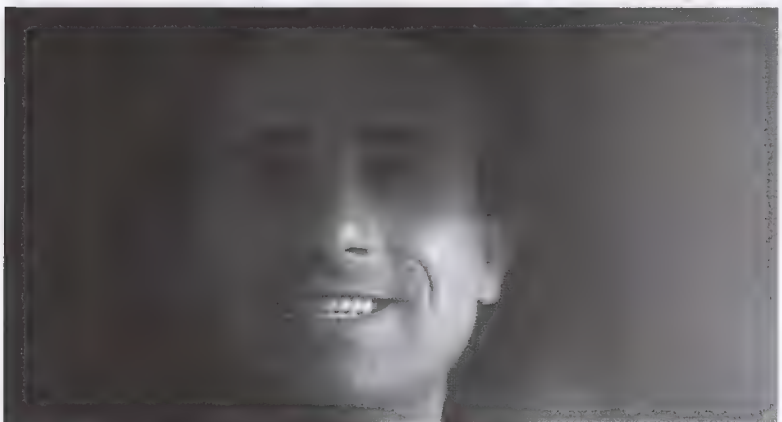
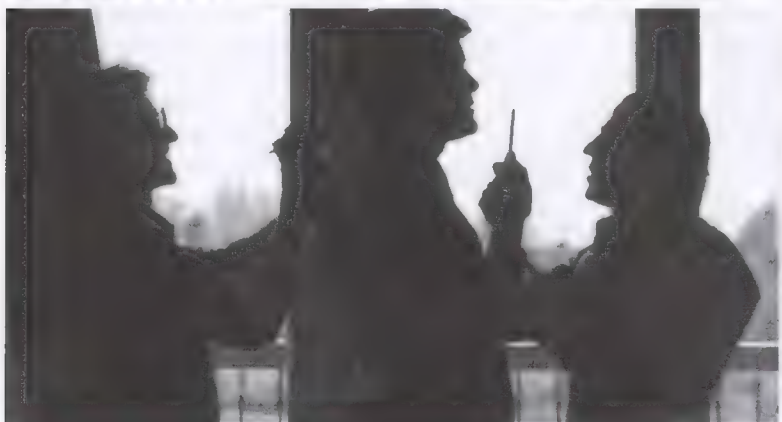
Best among the supporting characters is Impasible Carter, a flamboyantly sadistic gangster whom we first see beating up Malboro with a flurry of immaculate flamenco kicks. He’s played by one of the ‘finds’ of Franco’s Benidorm movies, Agustín García (see also *Las chicas del tanga*), whose genuine screen presence and ironic sensibility is entirely in keeping with Franco’s approach in this film. Carter’s second encounter with Malboro is worth looking at in more detail because it exemplifies some of the strengths and weaknesses of the film. García is perfectly menacing (and very funny) as the flick-knife wielding psychopath, and his confrontation with Mayans in the latter’s hotel-room is framed beautifully by Franco’s camerawork, backlit by glaring sunlight. However, lack of time and money appears to have resulted in the entire scene being played out in medium shot. To reverse or otherwise change the camera angle would require a totally different lighting set-up (all the more difficult without the expertise of Juan Soler, who didn’t work on this film). Consequently, Franco delivers the entire confrontation

as a mid-shot tableau. The drama of the scene positively begs for tight shots of the sneering villain, the knife edging closer to the hero’s throat, the sweat trickling down Mayans’ impassive features. Instead we see it all in profile, partially bleached out by the light streaming through the window. Note that despite his prominence in the story, García has not been granted a single close-up at this point: given the importance of close-ups in the type of Hollywood cinema Franco is pastiching, this counts as a serious oversight. Only during his comeuppance scene do we get a sustained shot of the villain’s face.

The film takes a deliberately flippant attitude to its ‘MacGuffin’ character, the missing Macho Jim, a character who is lampooned and undercut, both by his absurd name and his handling within the story. For a start, it’s an inversion of Hollywood tradition for a woman to employ a detective to find her missing boyfriend. Having mockingly set up this ‘macho’ character as the lost property of an active female, Franco then uses him as little more than a visual token: a sop perhaps to the youth demographic? Was Franco tired of being told by producers and distributors to aim for a youth audience? He edits shots of Macho Jim into the action as a cipher or visual icon, played by handsome José Llamas as a lipsticked New York punk crossed with a Deanesque ‘rockabilly rebel’. But when it comes to the punch, this posturing, preening male turns tail and runs; as Felipe Malboro puts it, in a calculatedly lame ‘punchline’ scene that effectively mocks both characters, he’s more ‘Yellow Jim’ than Macho Jim. Or, to quote another of Malboro’s ineffectual ‘zingers’, “*So you are Macho Jim? You are Macho Shit!*” The point of all this seems to be a jibe at the vanity of contemporary youth culture (Llamas looks like he’s mimicking teen icon of the day Matt Dillon), yet Franco’s mockery of Macho Jim is ultimately too shallow to avoid appearing no more than a middle-aged man’s resentment of the younger generation. However over-pampered, clichéd and effete Macho Jim may appear, we need more character detail if we’re to side with Franco’s dislike of him. Culturally, the film’s preferential treatment of an older cliché (the tough guy detective who beds women almost as a duty to his stereotype) seems at odds with the deconstruction of that character in Franco’s *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*, which for my money is the better film. Whatever Franco’s attitude to the trashy pop culture of the early 1980s, he seems to acknowledge the futility of his satire by rolling the credits over a final shot of the now-deceased Macho Jim, pouting prettily at the camera, transcending death in an eternal fashion shoot...

Franco on screen: A significant role for Jess as a bar-room pianist called Sam, echoing the famed ivory-tickler of ‘Rick’s Café Américain’ in *Casablanca*.

Cast and crew: Trino Trives (aka Trino Martínez Trives), who plays the villainous drug dealer Saúl Winston, was a friend of Franco’s who went on to rack up six more performances for him, although two were in films that were never released (*Voces de muerte* and *Barrio chino*). He can be seen in *En busca del dragón dorado*, *La chica de los labios rojos*, *Viaje a Bangkok*, *ataúd incluido* and *Dark Mission*.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: José Llamas as 'Macho Jim'; Antonio Mayans as Felipe Malboro; Mayans with María del Mar Sánchez as Mary Lucky; Mayans; Juana de la Morena as 'Golfá'; Mayans with Lina Romay as 'Butterfly'; Agustín García as 'Impasible Carter'; García, Mayans and unknown actor

Away from Franco's films he was a respected theatre director, well known in serious theatrical circles for groundbreaking productions of Ionesco and Beckett in the 1960s ... "You look like a priest or some kind of weird politician," says Golfa to Felipe Malboro, and she's right. Mayans plays the character buttoned up, immaculately groomed, but somehow cadaverous, like a vampire posing as a Mormon missionary.

Music: Fatally damping down the possibility of fireworks in the production is Fernando García Morcillo's flatly conventional soundtrack; how one yearns instead for the blaring energetic tomfoolery of Jerry van Rooyen's themes for *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster!* The comparison is not made gratuitously: the music for *Los blues de la calle Pop* is pulled from earlier Morcillo commissions, including his title themes for the Spanish cuts of *Sadisterotica* (*El caso de las dos bellezas*) and *Kiss Me Monster* (*Bésame monstruo*), which you may recall were rescored by van Rooyen for their American releases. Morcillo's brand of jazz is the kind you put on as you sit and digest your lunch on a Sunday afternoon; sedate, easy-listening, nostalgic, a sort of period muzak. His mid-paced toe-tappers for clarinet and banjo are pleasant enough but they fail to set a fire in the film's belly, the one exception being a mesmeric and hallucinatory composition which accompanies the lovemaking scene between Mayans and Romay ... The lack of a decent post-synch soundtrack also limits the film, especially near the end when Analía Ivars must sneak up on Mayans and Romay by passing through a bead curtain; we really need the click of the beads to add tension and presence, but the soundtrack remains stubbornly mute.

Locations: Benidorm, a travel-brochure tourist trap on the south coast of Spain. On the subject of Benidorm, Franco had this to say: "There is a place in Spain which is kind of a set, an enormous set, called Benidorm. Benidorm was kind of a fishing village thirty years ago when I went there for the first time. And now it's an enormous town with buildings with forty flats and things like that. But very badly done! Very nasty architects, awful colors. And so I decided to make a story, let's say a little bit like Raymond Chandler crossed with Madonna, but set in that town, you know, in the confusion of that town. Because it's not a real town. It's a set. It's an unbelievable place. Nobody was born there, but in summertime there are four-hundred thousand people there – which is a lot. It's mysterious. And so I wanted to put my story in the middle of this madness."¹

Connections: The film's ludicrously elongated title harks back to the vogue for nonsensical nomenclature in the Italian spy movies of the 1960s ... Felipe Malboro is yet another in a chain of hapless and exploited private eyes in Franco's detective stories, who get into deep water through the machinations of their dangerous femme fatale clients: see Al Pereira in *Downtown*, *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* and *Camino solitario*, and Al Crosby in *Pick-Up Girls* ... While the music draws upon two of Franco's 1960s Aquila productions, the comic twin productions *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster*, a scene shot through a fishtank recalls the third, and most celebrated Aquila film, *Necronomicon*.

EL HUÉSPED DE LA NIEBLA

translation: *The Guest of the Fog*

PHOTOGRAPHED BUT NOT DIRECTED BY FRANCO

director: **Rosa M. Almirall** [aka **Lina Romay**]. script: **Rosa M. Almirall** [aka **Lina Romay**]. Text by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. Paintings by Jerónimo Bosch and Francisco de Goya. camera: **Jess Franco**. music: **Jess Franco** ("interpreted by him on the Prophet 5"). colour: Eastmancolor.

Narrated by **Javier Viñas**.

Timeline

Shooting date	1982
Depósito legal number	30 December 1982

Theatrical running time

Spain	10m
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EL TREN EXPRESO

translation: *The Express Train*

PHOTOGRAPHED BUT NOT DIRECTED BY FRANCO

Spain 1982

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

director: **Rosa M. Almirall** [aka **Lina Romay**]. script: **Rosa M. Almirall** [aka **Lina Romay**]. camera: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel White**. colour: Eastmancolor.

Timeline

Shooting date	1982
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These short documentaries directed by Lina Romay were shot by Jess Franco, who also provided the music. The films were produced as contributions to an exhibition in Andalusia devoted to the preservation of old trains in the region.

The first, *El huésped de la niebla*, uses as its text a poem by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870), a prominent figure in Spanish poetry whose work is frequently taught in high school (see *Mansion of the Living Dead*). *El huésped de la niebla* is not to be confused with a 2008 short called *Huesped de niebla y luz*, also based on the Bécquer poem.

The second short film, *El tren expreso*, uses a poem by an unidentified Spanish writer, and features a track from Daniel J. White's library LP *Mystère Bleuté* called "Hors D'Haleine", which can also be heard in *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* (1982) and *Tender Flesh* (1997).

FURIA EN EL TRÓPICO

(original Spanish theatrical title)

Spain 1982

depósito legal number (*Furia en el trópico*): M-2.634-1983

depósito legal number (*Mujeres acorraladas*): M-6.346-1986

Alternative titles

Orgasmo Perverso (SP alt. theatrical with hardcore inserts)

Mujeres acorraladas (SP theatrical with new narrative material)

Cornered Women

Production companies

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Herminio Garcia Calvo (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Mundial Films S.A. (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa November	1982
<i>Furia</i> Depósito legal no.	25 January	1983
<i>Mujeres</i> Depósito legal no.	21 February	1986
Madrid (as <i>Orgasmo Perverso</i>)	31 March	1986

I can find no record of cinema bookings for *Furia en el trópico* or *Mujeres acorraladas*.

Intended theatrical running time

Spain (*Mujeres acorraladas*) 85m

Video running times (converted)

<i>Furia en el trópico</i> SP 'Valfer Video' PAL VHS	87m51s
<i>Mujeres acorraladas</i> SP 'Video Familiar' PAL VHS	82m32s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. executive producer for Fervi Films: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz** [as 'Enrique Diez']. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. music: **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and **Jess Franco**. music recording: **Estudios Regson**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Uncredited: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Marga Lopez). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Sergeant Chano). **María del Mar Sánchez** [as 'Veronica Setton'] (Rosaura Via). **Ricardo Palacios** (Colonel Blanco). **Verónica Arezchavaleta** [as 'Ana Stern'] (Prison Governess). **Sonia Berco** (Chincha, the brothel madam). **Juana**

de la Morena (shivering prisoner). *Mujeres acorraladas* adds: **Mel Rodrigo** (Father Rodrigo).

Synopsis: *Somewhere in South America; the present. As two women, Marga and Rosaura, flee for their lives through a dense jungle, Marga muses on the reason for their plight. In prolonged flashback we see that they were prostitutes at a bamboo-walled brothel for an unspecified revolutionary militia. Marga fell in love with a handsome soldier, Chano, who was unable to prevent the whores being sent to a prison run by a wicked female Directress. This sadistic lesbian revels in beating the inmates, and demands sexual satisfaction from her victims. Marga is beaten and abused but tricks her way into a position of trust with the Directress; meanwhile Chano works to free her. Rosaura meanwhile is pressed into sexual servitude by the Directress. Eventually, Marga smuggles a knife into the Directress's bedroom and with Rosaura's help, stabs her. The two women flee to meet Chano at a pre-arranged location on the coast, but on the journey they are raped by a gang of men; Rosaura dies. Arriving at last at the arranged rendezvous, Marga is horrified when 'The Colonel', Chano's commanding officer, appears...*

Production notes: *Furia en el trópico*, Franco's first Women-in-Prison film since the commercially successful *Sadomania* two years earlier, was shot for a new outfit called Fervi Films (see also *Una rajita para dos*). An ill-fated project, *Furia* failed to find a release in the cinema until four years later, when it branched into two new versions. The first of these, *Mujeres acorraladas* (produced by Herminio Garcia Calvo of Mundial Films), dropped *Furia en el trópico*'s sado-sexual excesses and topped up the running time with new dramatic material filmed by Franco. It was given a new Depósito Legal number on 21 February 1986, but like *Furia* it was never released in cinemas. The second variant, *Orgasmo perverso*, added hardcore scenes and played for two weeks in Madrid from 31 March, making it the only version of *Furia en el trópico* ever to see the light of a projector. Franco scholar Francesco Cesari, who has seen the Spanish ratings documents, believes that the problem stemmed from the 'X' certificate handed out to the original cut. Although *Furia en el trópico* was not hardcore, it was nevertheless given a hardcore rating, which would have prevented bookings in regular cinemas. This was not what producers Fervi Film (aka Ferlei Films) had been looking for, as Cesari explains: "They had two choices: film new scenes to obtain an 'S' certificate, or shoot new footage to make it into a real porn film. Of course the first way was more expensive, which is why the film became the hardcore *Orgasmo perverso*."¹

Franco had found himself in a similar situation before, when two of his mid-70s French films for Eurociné, *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973) and *Exorcism* (1974), were deemed too 'hard' for the intended market and were thus split into variant editions, with a 'sexed-up' version created for porno cinemas and a softer version created for mainstream cinemas. In those cases, however, both versions were created by the parent production company, whereas *Furia en el trópico* ended up being resold to a second company for

its proposed 'mainstream' release as *Mujeres acorraladas*. Cesari continues, "As for *Mujeres acorraladas*, it was just a trick: the distributor Mundial Films officially produced it as a new film, but obviously for the most part it was *Furia en el trópico* – the new scenes are definitely a minority. In a way, this was the other solution, the more expensive one. But, on the other hand, Mundial sold (or tried to sell) *Mujeres acorraladas*, as a new film, and as a new film it was very cheap! There is no evidence that *Mujeres acorraladas* was released theatrically. But as you know, the film is in the Filmoteca Española database, whereas *Furia en el trópico* isn't, for the simple reason that it 'became' *Orgasmo perverso*. Maybe the *Mujeres acorraladas* trick was discovered and the Ministry didn't allow distribution."²

Review: No one who has seen Franco's Women-in-Prison films of the 1970s (*Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Ilsa the Wicked Warden*, *Love Camp*, *Women in Cellblock 9*) need worry too much if they miss this late entry in the sub-genre. It adds nothing new, simply recapping the format's obvious bullet-points while lacking the extra detail that would elevate or justify its existence. Let's be honest: the reason for watching WIP movies is to revel in gloating depictions of sexual cruelty. If the film can't get that right, it's scarcely worth bothering. Apart from two flagellation scenes devoid of impact shots, an unconvincing nipple-slicing, and a rowdy but ineffectual gang rape, there's little to raise the pulse (the gang rape is like something from a 1960s David Friedman production, with a bunch of fully dressed guys wriggling around on top of two screaming girls). There is at least some nastiness here and there, such as the potentially disturbing scene in which Marga helps the Colonel brutalise her friend, but unfortunately it isn't conveyed with enough detail. We need proper characterisation, insightful dialogue. If there's one image here that could be said to add to Franco's ongoing gallery of the grotesque, it's the moment when Marga (Lina Roday) despatches her authoritarian nemesis (Ana Stern) with a knife to the vagina, but the scene lacks visceral detail and the victim dies far too quickly. One need only refer back to *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* to see how it should have been handled, and that's the problem with *Furia en el trópico*; its candle burns feebly when set beside the magnesium malignancy of Franco's best work. Perhaps he felt a lack of commitment as he trudged yet again through the shrubbery of Spain in search of that ever more elusive Women-in-Prison thrill. The film feels wilted and unresponsive, as if the director has lost his zest for sado-eroticism. It's striking that *Furia en el trópico* was the last Women-in-Prison film that Franco would ever direct, which suggests that by 1982 his long-standing penal obsession had been well and truly fringed to death.

Cast and crew: Every now and then in Franco's 1980s films it becomes difficult, for a variety of reasons, to match the names of the actors to the characters in the film. To begin with, the screen credits provide no character attributions. Sometimes the only available version of a film is a blurry VHS transfer, which makes visual identification very challenging. One is frequently dealing

with individuals who have only acted in one or two movies, and matters are made even more difficult when it turns out, in some instances, that the same pseudonym has been used by more than one actor (see 'Joan Virly' and 'Lorna Green'). Add to this the absence of publicity materials for the more obscure titles, and the Internet Movie Database's woeful habit of allowing people to amend film credits without provenance, and a perfect storm of confusion arises.

Every one of these problems afflicts *Furia en el trópico*. When we try to decide who plays the heroine's best friend Rosaura, for instance, or the sadistic Prison Governess, we run into all sorts of trouble. The only primary sources currently available are poor-quality VHS transfers; there is no available pressbook for the film; neither Alain Petit's *Jess Franco ou les prospérités du bis* nor the multi-authored *Obsession* venture any information on the subject; and the IMDb provides highly dubious information that seems to me to have been added on the basis of guesswork. Nevertheless, I will try to contribute something useful and explain my reasoning as we go along!

Apart from Marga, played by Lina Roday, the two main female characters in *Furia en el trópico* are Marga's best friend Rosaura, and the sadistic prison Governess. It's reasonable to assume that these roles are played by second-billed 'Veronica Setton' (sometimes given as Veronica Seeton, owing to a misspelling on a Spanish VHS cover) and third-billed 'Ana Stern'.³ These are pseudonyms: so who are they really, and which actress plays which role? First, let us deal with the IMDb's claim that 'Ana Stern' is a pseudonym for Mari Carmen Nieto, an actress who appears (under her regular pseudonym 'Mamie Kaplan') in a slew of Franco's 1980s films including *Mansion of the Living Dead* (1982), *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* (1982), *Night Has a Thousand Desires* (1983), *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* (1983) and *The Sexual Story of O* (1983). Is Mari Carmen Nieto in *Furia en el trópico*, as the IMDb claims? No. There's a superficial resemblance between Nieto and the actress playing Rosaura, but closer attention reveals telling differences in the shape of the nose and jaw. Rosaura is in fact played by María del Mar Sánchez, who appears in Franco's 1983 film *Los blues de la calle Pop* under the pseudonym 'Mary Sad'. Identification was hampered for many years by the atrocious quality of the VHS releases for both these films, a problem subsequently alleviated by a good quality TV transmission of *Los blues de la calle Pop* in 2016.

Moving on to *Furia en el trópico*'s Governess: the same actress pops up again a few months later as the villainous foreign agent Lida, in Franco's *Sangre en mis zapatos* (1983). Unfortunately, as per usual, the credits for *Sangre en mis zapatos* give no character credits, just a list of actors. The first female listed is Lina Roday, who plays the ditsy Paquita; the second is Verónica Arezchavaleta. Given that Lida is by far the most important female character after Paquita, I think it's safe to say that she – and thus *Furia*'s evil Governess – is played by Verónica Arezchavaleta. The same actress, appearing under her own name, can also be seen alongside

Lina Romay in *Mi conejo es el mejor* (1982). This is a softcore sex film by actor-turned-director Ricardo Palacios, a close friend of Franco's who plays the corrupt Colonel Blanco in *Furia en el trópico*. Judging by Romay's hairstyle in *Mi conejo es el mejor*, it was shot just before *Furia en el trópico*, for which it functions as a sort of dry-run (Arechavaleta plays a similar role as a prison wardress, and can be seen enthusiastically whipping Lina Romay). It seems very likely, then, that Franco cast Verónica Arechavaleta in *Furia en el trópico* on the basis of her performance in *Mi conejo es el mejor*.

So we have our two actresses – Rosaura is played by María del Mar Sánchez and the Governess by Verónica Arechavaleta – but what about the pseudonyms? Which of the two is 'Ana Stern' and which is 'Veronica Setton'? Without consulting the performers themselves, there's no way to be absolutely certain – and besides, in Franco's 1980s films the same pseudonyms were sometimes used by different actresses, at which point one may feel like giving up! But let's persist. The 'Ana Stern' moniker was first used on Franco's *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* (1982), in which the aforementioned Mari Carmen Nieto plays 'Lida DeWinter', with the other female roles taken by top-billed Katja Bienert and Lina Romay, and the black actress Aline Mess. Given that there are no other female characters in *El tesoro* to whom the pseudonym could refer, it would seem that Nieto was indeed 'Ana Stern' in this particular case (which is probably why someone has erroneously amended *Furia en el trópico*'s IMDb entry to state that Ana Stern 'is' Mari Carmen Nieto).⁴ A variant of this name ('Ann Stern') appears prominently on the posters and pressbooks for two of Franco's 1983 films, *Sola ante el terror* and *Sangre en mis zapatos* – but it's not among the screen credits! Neither María del Mar Sánchez nor Mari Carmen Nieto appear in *Sola ante el terror* or *Sangre en mis zapatos*, whereas Verónica Arechavaleta, as already mentioned, is the villainous Lida in the latter. I would therefore suggest that 'Ann Stern' is Verónica Arechavaleta, based on a match for two out of four occurrences of the pseudonym (*Furia en el trópico* and *Sangre en mis zapatos*), with Mari Carmen Nieto using it once (*El tesoro de la diosa blanca*). Incidentally, its use on the poster for *Sola ante el terror* is a special case: the same poster design also names Katja Bienert and Karen Field as cast members, although neither actually appeared in the film. It would seem that this poster was designed before casting was finalised; in which case perhaps Verónica Arechavaleta, once again using the pseudonym 'Ann Stern', had been expected to play one of the wicked sisters ultimately played by Carmen Carrión and Mabel Escaño? (She would have been suitable, given that both parts require a mature actress capable of projecting menace.)

If I'm right, and Verónica Arechavaleta is *Furia en el trópico*'s 'Ana Stern', then we can safely say that María del Mar Sánchez is 'Veronica Setton'. End of story. Unless, of course, you prefer to disregard these deductions entirely, and allot 'Veronica Setton' to Verónica Arechavaleta purely on the basis of the shared first name! Are you ready to rip out your hair by the roots yet?

Music: *Furia en el trópico* borrows more atmosphere than it really deserves from earlier Franco films, thanks to a plethora of excellent music cues from *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, *Macumba Sexual*, *Gemidos de placer* and *La noche de los sexos abiertos*.

Locations: La Manga del Mar Menor and Lo Pagan, in Murcia, Spain. The odd-looking bridge seen during an outdoor conversation between the Colonel and the Directress is the Puente de la Risa (Bridge of Laughter), so named because of the lurch in the pit of the stomach one feels when driving over its steep hump. It was intended by designer Tomás Maestre to be just one feature of a planned redevelopment of the northern Mar Menor region, a 'Little Venice' with residential construction around a network of small canals. The bridge was finished in 1978 but the rest never happened, although the region is still referred to by locals as 'la Veneziola'.

Connections: The story is a mash-up of previous Franco films about women in prison, from *99 Women* (1968) to *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975). Verónica Arechavaleta's whip-brandishing address to a yard full of prisoners revisits a similar scene in the latter film, although sadly without the villainess wearing hotpants and a monocle ... The title pays homage to the André de Toth film *Slaterry's Hurricane* (1949) starring Richard Widmark and Veronica Lake: in Spain it was called *Furia en el trópico* (or at least it was in Madrid cinema listings: the Spanish film poster says *Furia del trópico...*)

Other versions: *Furia en el trópico* failed to find a buyer until it was re-edited with hardcore footage and released as *Orgasmo perverso*. This version did at least manage to sneak through a projector in Madrid, in March 1986, but has so far never turned up on video or DVD. The same year, Franco added non-pornographic footage to *Furia en el trópico* and created a third variant, *Mujeres acorraladas*, which removes pretty much all the sleaze and violence (say goodbye to the flagellation, breast-cutting and knife to the vagina). All that survives of the rough stuff is the silly and unconvincing gang rape. Instead of adding more exploitation bang for the audience's buck, *Mujeres acorraladas* compensates for the lost material by adding more of everyone's least favourite ingredient: wandering around in the woods. Marga's escape with Rosaura now accounts for about a third of the running time, and comes complete with a padded romance with Chano along the way. These interludes are only worth seeing for the absurd wig that Lina Romay wears in an effort to match the bubble perm she sported in the original footage; perched on her head like a demented bonnet, it makes her look like a deranged 'hair-hopper' in a John Waters movie! The new ending offers a more downbeat conclusion, in which Marga and Father Rodrigo (Mel Rodrigo) are betrayed by Chano and executed by the Colonel and his men. Mel Rodrigo's hairstyle in these scenes suggests that the extra material for *Mujeres acorraladas* was gathered during the shoot for *Esclavas del crimen* (1986) in which he plays a leading role sporting near-identical coiffure.

EL HUNDIMIENTO DE LA CASA USHER

(Eurociné export title)

(Version 1): Spain 1982

(Version 2): Spain 1984

(Version 3): France 1988

dépósito legal no: M-2.635-1983

French visa no: 56664

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Version 1: **El hundimiento de la casa Usher** (SP)

The Fall of the House of Usher

Version 2: **Los crímenes de Usher** (SP) *The Crimes of Usher*

Version 3: **Névrose** (FR) *Neurosis*

Alternative titles

La Chute de la Maison Usher (FR visa title/FR video)

Neurosis (export title)

Neurosis The Fall of the House of Usher

(export title with additional video-generated subtitle)

Revenge in the House of Usher (US DVD title)

A Queda da Casa de Usher (POR DVD title)

The Fall of the House of Usher

Die Rache des Hauses Usher (WG video)

The Revenge of the House of Usher

Neuroza (Osveta u ku i ašerovih) (YUG video)

Neurosis (Revenge of the House of Asher [sic])

Production company (Versions 1 and 2)

Elite Films (Madrid)

Production company (Version 3)

Eurociné (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date, version 1	circa November	1982
Dépósito legal number	25 January	1983
Imagfic Festival screening, Spain	23 March	1983
Reviewed in El País	24 March	1983
Reviewed in ABC Madrid	25 March	1983
Shooting date, version 2		1984
Shooting date, version 3		1988
French Visa issued	06 May	1988

El hundimiento de la casa Usher was screened only once, at the Imagfic Festival. I have not been able to confirm theatrical screenings for *Los crímenes de Usher* or *Névrose*.

Intended theatrical running time

Spain	90m
France	93m

Video and DVD running times

Felipe M. Guerra's reconstruction of <i>Hundimiento</i> ...	67m44s
<i>Los crímenes de Usher</i> work-print	76m47s
'Image Entertainment' NTSC DVD	89m11s

credits for *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*: writer/director: **Jess Franco**. executive producer for Elite Films: **Rogelio López Fernández**. director of photography: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant [miscredited as 'camera operator']: **Enrique Díaz** [as 'Enrique Diez']. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. art designer: **Carlos Isbert**. editor: **Laura Arias**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. music recording (in Dolby): **Eurosonic**. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast in El hundimiento de la casa Usher: **Antonio Mayans** (Alan Harker). **Howard Vernon** (Eric Ulmer Usher). **Lina Romay** (Maria, Usher's housekeeper and mistress). **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] (Doctor Seward). **Antonio Marin** (Matthias, Usher's manservant). **Fata Morgana** (Edmunda Usher, Eric's wife). **Ana Galán** (Ana, the maid). **José Llamas** (Adrian, the stable boy). *Additional cast members for Los crímenes de Usher*: **Flavia Mayans** (Usher's child victim). **Analía Ivars** [aka Joan Virly] (prostitute).

credits for Névrose/Revenge in the House of Usher: a film by **Jess Franco**. based on the novel "The Fall of the House of Usher" by **Edgard Allan Poë** [sic]. photography: **Allan Hardy**. screenplay: **H.L. Rostaine**. special effects: **S.O.I.S. company**. executive producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. music: **Daniel White**. script-girl [continuity]: **Iiona Kunesova**. Éclair Laboratories. titles-optical effects: **Mike Rapp**.

Cast in Névrose/Revenge in the House of Usher: **Antonio Mayans** (Alan Hacker). **Olivier Mathot** [as 'Oliver Mato'] (Morpho). **Howard Vernon** (Dr. Usher). **Lina Romay** (Maria, Dr. Usher's housekeeper). **Daniel White** [as 'Dan Villers'] (Dr. Seward). **José Llamas** (Adrian, a servant). **Jean Tolzac** (Matthias, Usher's manservant). **Françoise Blanchard** (Melissa). **Analía Ivars** [aka Joan Virly].

"During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher." – from "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe

Synopsis: A young doctor, Alan Harker, is called to the castle abode of his old professor from university, Eric Usher, to help write his memoirs. Harker finds Usher paranoid, confused and decrepit, living out his last days in loneliness and misery. His only company is a maid, Maria, and a manservant, Matthias. Harker calls Usher's physician from the village,

Dr. Seward, who quietly informs him that Usher does not have much longer to live. That night, Harker hears cries in the castle and wanders the corridors to investigate. He finds blood on the floor, Matthias locked in a dungeon, and Usher crouched over the dead body of a woman he's just killed. Horrified, Harker runs away but falls and bangs his head. The next morning, he rises from his bed and begins to believe that the events of the night were a dream. However, as Usher tells Harker his life story, he confesses to a string of murders; young women, and in one instance, a child. He also claims to be haunted by the spirit of his dead wife, Edmonda. Harker is disgusted by the stories and sets off to leave the castle, but Seward intervenes and begs him to stay – the old man's stories are nonsense, and Harker's presence can help him in his final hours. However, Seward is wrong; Usher really is a murderer, and the ghost of his wife, Edmonda, walks the castle...

Production notes: In the autumn of 1982, Franco turned his attention once again to the horror genre and created one of his most experimental, though often derided, films of the period, an extremely loose Edgar Allan Poe adaptation called *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*. The project was bankrolled by a short-lived Spanish firm called Elite Films (nothing to do with Erwin Dietrich's Swiss production house), who also funded Franco's jungle adventure *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* immediately afterwards (see *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*). Sadly, such was the ignoble fate of *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* that it hastened the demise of Elite, who never financed another film.

If ever a Franco film was out of step with changes in the horror genre, it's *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*. A period Gothic when the genre was leaning heavily towards contemporary settings, totally bloodless when screens were awash with Tom Savini gore, and cheaply made when audience expectations were being stoked by films like *Poltergeist* and *The Thing*, it stuck out like a sore thumb when programmed at the Festival de Cine Imaginario y de Ciencia Ficción in Madrid, in August 1983. This was to be its one public outing, and unfortunately the occasion was not a happy one – neither for Franco nor the film's villainous 'mostruo', Howard Vernon, who attended the festival and introduced the film. The screening was a disaster. The film was greeted with hostility, impatience and mocking laughter, leading an exasperated Franco to declare that the audience understood nothing of his work. The following day, Spanish newspaper *El País* reported on the screening: "El hundimiento de la casa Usher united the audience in their rejection. The laughter, nervous at first, increased as the clumsy narrative, which veteran director Jesus Franco had boasted about, advanced. Earlier, lead actor Howard Vernon addressed a few words to those present, claiming that while he still had not seen *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*, he admired Franco from working with him on *Gritos el la noche* (1961). His admiration has probably declined by now. The Spanish director's latest work is not only naive, flat and of a staggering banality, but seems to consider the audience devoid of the common sense necessary, for example, to identify a well-known castle converted into a luxury hotel as the alleged House of Usher, or to spot a lousy, minimal

model of the original mansion that collapses along with its mysterious and pathetic owner who's lived there for centuries. The dialogue, locations, makeup, and the attitude of the characters are straight out of an amateur experiment rather than the work of an expert team of professionals. The audience understood this, jokingly trying to provoke a final applause that could not be sustained."¹

The response might have been less vitriolic if only the critics and the audience had been aware of the incredibly minuscule resources with which the film was made. Franco, who'd worked with a crew of more than a hundred on *Justine* in the 1960s, shot *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* himself, with one of the smallest crews of his career: a camera assistant, a make-up person, a props man, his partner Lina Romy, and the film's co-star Antonio Mayans doubling as production manager. Though presented to the Festival alongside far more conventionally budgeted movies, no one connected with the Franco film appears to have pointed this out (probably out of pride) and no one else seems to have understood. The laughter and derision blew the film's chance of a cinema release, and so the original 85-minute version of *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* disappeared, never to be seen again.

But that was not the end of the story. Franco would return to the footage again, first in 1984 and then in 1988, creating two variant editions: a Spanish-language version called *Los crímenes de Usher* and a French language version for Eurociné called *Névrose* aka *Revenge in the House of Usher*. The former surfaced online in the mid-2000s, thanks to a 16mm work-print circulated on peer-to-peer sites, while the latter is the version most Franco fans will have seen: it was released in the USA by Wizard Video, and picked up for release in the early days of DVD by Image Entertainment. (See 'Other versions'.)

For a film that has struggled terribly to find an audience, *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* has found along the way some tenacious and committed advocates. Tim Lucas described it as, "Franco's most Wellesian film. There are bits and pieces here from Poe [...] and *Stoker*, but also from *The Trial*, *Falstaff*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, and most of all *The Immortal Story*. I honestly believe that if Welles had taken this same material and made a movie out of it, he could have passed off the result as some kind of genre-jumping interpretation of *King Lear*." And thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Brazilian filmmaker Felipe M. Guerra, we can actually see, today, at least two thirds of Franco's original cut. In May 2015, in consultation with Antonio Mayans and Carlos Aguilar, Guerra pieced together all the available material belonging to Franco's original version, removing the material peculiar to *Los crímenes de Usher* and *Revenge in the House of Usher* and then patching together the remainder, utilising wherever possible the original Spanish soundtrack. (Where Spanish dialogue was missing, he included French audio from the Eurociné cut as long as it stayed true to the original script, although a couple of 'bald patches' were inevitable given Eurociné's rewriting of the original.) The running time of this 'fan edit' (67 minutes) is roughly eighteen minutes shorter than the version screened in Madrid in 1983, and the picture



(Antonio Mayans) finds sickness and decay in the
house of his old professor. In El hundimiento de la casa Usher.



TOP L: The Castillo de Santa Catalina, in Jaén. TOP R: Eric Usher (Howard Vernon) greets Alan Harker, a scientific colleague whom he invited but does not remember.
 MAIN PICTURE: This photograph, taken by Juan Soler Cózar during the shoot for Los crímenes de Usher, sees Usher styled more in the vein of Count Dracula.
 BOTTOM L: Harker (Antonio Mayans) wakes to find Maria (Lina Romay) in his bedroom. BOTTOM R: Usher about to kill Maria, his housekeeper and sometime mistress.

quality varies drastically (the material is culled from the *Revenge* DVD and a murky videotape copy of the 16mm *Los crímenes* work-print) but it's the best indication so far of Franco's original intentions. Hopefully, one day, the negative will be located, and Franco's original cut will arrive on Blu-ray...

Review: *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* is Franco's last true Gothic horror film, but its appeal is far from universal. The most commonly seen version, *Revenge in the House of Usher*, is usually condemned by reviewers as cheap, shoddy and boring, and the original is unlikely to woo these critics either, sharing as it does the same ultra-low budget and very slow pacing. But if you can home in on its muted sepulchral frequency, *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* is soaked in Franco's strange magic and demonstrates his remarkable skill for making something out of almost nothing.

Beautifully lit, and immaculately photographed, it's the tale of a young doctor summoned to a remote castle to transcribe the memoirs of a respected academic, Eric Ulmer Usher, whose mind is now beset by the ravages of old age. Is he, as he claims, being assailed by vengeful spirits, including the ghost of the wife he claims to have murdered? Or are these apparitions just a symptom of senile dementia, the sad and lonely visions of a man wracked by guilt for things he may or may not have done? We cannot be sure. Reality is hard to pin down, as so often in Franco's horror films. The young hero, Alan Harker (Antonio Mayans, looking classically perfect for the role), experiences strange visions of his own when he spends the night at the Usher residence. But are *his* encounters genuine, or simply nightmare imaginings brought on by proximity to the old man's collapsing psyche? Franco does not specify. Harker is left mulling precisely this question as the film ends, and thus we remain perched at the brink between rational and supernatural, where the authentic chill of the uncanny holds sway.

This is a slow, haunting, gossamer creation, and a last bitter-sweet visit to the Gothic horrors which so enthralled Franco in his youth. As such, it belongs in the same category as *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1971), *Dracula's Daughter* (1972) and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), films with a more fevered approach but tied to the same roots. It's as though we're seeing two dying embers at the same time: Usher, who is old and crazy and dying; and the genre he represents. There's a tired poignancy to the film's minimalist scenario – even the cheapness has its place, as if the gaudy furniture of gothic horror has been packed away by time's removal men, leaving only the bare stonework of loneliness and death. Usher looks dwarfed by his cavernous old castle, the corridors and stairways of which seem to mock his human frailty. As in the original story by Poe, Usher's fate is tied to the house; he's a corpse before death, and his home is a mausoleum-in-waiting. But his problems don't end there; the ghost of his wife, not to mention his previous victims, provide unwanted company in the echoing vaults of the castle. With only a loyal maid, her stable-boy lover, and a devoted but simple-minded manservant for company, Usher has nothing to do except brood over the ghosts of his past.

El hundimiento de la casa Usher may be cheaply made, it may lack excitement, it may creak and groan at a slow, slumberous pace that will send many an unsympathetic visitor (and even a few believers) to sleep, but one thing that no one can criticise is Franco's compositional clarity, the care with which each shot has been created. One could take still images of nearly every camera set-up and create a stunning book of photographs that would make the film seem a classic of its kind. It's only really the tissue-thin plot and sluggish editing, the enervating slide into emptiness that accompanies the simplest of actions, that lets the film down. Even then, if you can ease yourself into a rhythm which moves very slowly, image by image, like the grave tick-tock of an antique grandfather clock, you may find the film a hidden, neglected joy, linking skeletal hands with the Gothic chillers of Mario Bava, Edgar G. Ulmer, F.W. Murnau and Tod Browning.

Music: The soundtrack varies depending on which version you see. The best known variant, *Revenge in the House of Usher*, uses a Daniel White library track called "La folie de Néron" (from the 1973 album *Le monde musical de Racine*) for the opening credits sequence. White recorded at least two more variations of this piece, one of which appears, on the same LP, as "Le monde musical de Racine (2e partie)", the other of which was featured as the title music on an early Eloy de la Iglesia film, *Cuadrilatero* (1970), credited to White and Franco together. During the final scenes of the Usher castle collapsing, the Eurociné version makes good use of the frenzied "Apocalypse No" from White's *Mood Music Selection No. 01. Los crímenes de Usher* uses the acoustic guitar theme from *La noche de los sexos abiertos*, slowed down to a ghostly metallic rumble, during the child-killing sequence.

Locations: The 'house of Usher' itself, inside and out, is the Castillo de Santa Catalina, overlooking the Spanish city of Jaén in Andalusia. It is now a luxurious four-star hotel and remains instantly recognisable.

Connections: Franco's visualisation of the House of Usher is surprisingly faithful to Poe's text: "The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling." ² ... When it comes to subtext, however, Franco diverges enormously. Most surprisingly, for some reason he has decided against the subtle (and, to be fair, academically disputed) implication of incest in the story; in fact he effaces it, by making Usher's 'significant female other' his wife rather than, as Poe does, his sister ... Usher's young visitor Alan Harker ('Hacker' in the English dub) draws us back towards Bram Stoker, as does the visiting physician Dr. Seward, here divested of anything like heroism and left to eke out his retirement as a visiting quack in an obscure Spanish coastal town ... *Los crímenes de Usher* spreads its allusive net more widely. A shot framed in an oval mirror, in which we see Usher

murder a child, quotes Murnau's *Nosferatu* in its accomplished use of shadow. Usher himself becomes an amalgamation of several Franco stock characters. He's a mad doctor, a psychic interloper, a killer of prostitutes, a deranged patriarch, and indeed a vampire. There are no fangs, there's no transformation into a bat, but in a single cloaked figure he combines many of Franco's villainous shadow-dwellers; Dr. Orloff, Jack the Ripper, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein's* mesmeric Cagliostro, *The Hot Nights of Linda's* miserable patriarch Paul Radeck, and, of course, Count Dracula himself. In addition, Usher's background as a doctor drummed out of his profession for unethical experiments harks back to *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965) and *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970).

Other versions: In July 1984, Franco invited Howard Vernon back to Spain to star in an espionage thriller called *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido*. With the actor at his disposal, he also suggested shooting new material for the unreleased *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*, and Vernon happily agreed. Thus, *Los crímenes de Usher* was born. In the hope that a more overtly horrific approach might succeed where the original version had not, Franco devised three additional scenes: two in which Usher attacks young women (linking him to Dracula and Jack the Ripper), and one in which he kills a child (establishing a thematic link to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*). Sandwiched into the film as reminiscences shared by Usher with his 'biographer' Alan Harker, these scenes are framed as confessions, along the lines of the less shocking admissions in the original. This time, Usher is depicted as a sort of ghoulish serial killer – every once in a while the bloodlust takes over and he roams the streets looking for victims to slake his thirst.

For reasons that are still unclear, *Los crímenes de Usher* failed to find distribution, making it the only version of the film never to have been shown or released officially. Fortunately a work-print has snuck onto the collectors' circuit in recent years, and while it's scratchy and covered in editor's pencil-marks, we can at least see what Franco was trying to achieve. The new material is gathered into three main sequences, beginning with a four-minute prologue before the credits. We hear Usher's voice hissing a woman's name on the wind, while on the soundtrack the frosty gale heard so frequently in Franco's recent work (see *Mansion of the Living Dead*) howls outside her bedroom window. As though by some implacable supernatural agency, the cloaked, sneering Usher enters the room, backing the victim into a corner and beating her to death with a silver-handled cane. In the second sequence, lasting around six minutes, the victim is a prostitute, picked up by Usher in broad daylight. Once in her room, he makes a show of worshipping her outstretched foot, kissing it yet smirking to himself, as if amused with his charade of subservience. He then stabs her repeatedly, and in a disgusting and protracted aftermath to the killing we watch him lick gore from the blade, in a frenzy of grotesque appetite. The third sequence, lasting a further six minutes, is the most disturbing. The victim (Flavia Mayans) is a child, a young girl no more than nine, whom we see skipping along a cloistered walkway. Usher's glaring eyes are superimposed over the shot, conveying an aura

of omnipotence reminiscent of Dr. Mabuse. Stepping out from behind a pillar, he sweeps the girl into his cloak, drags her away, and stabs her to death, before once again feasting on the blood as it drips from the blade.

It's a shame that *Los crímenes de Usher* is so rarely seen, because in the additional scenes Vernon gives a fantastic performance as one of Franco's most wicked and repulsive monsters. The knife-licking scenes are truly repellent: the elderly Usher, gloating and slavering as he gobbles down mouthfuls of blood, looks in some weird contorted way like a demented baby, absorbed in the joy of his obscene feeding. It's probably the most horrible facial expression yet seen in a Franco film, and it reminded me of two things: Kurt Raab's tour-de-force portrayal of a murdering paedophile in *Tenderness of the Wolves* (1973), and John Dugan as the hideous 'Grandpa' in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974).

In 1988, Eurociné majordomo Marius Lesoeur bought the rights to the film, but demanded a complete rethink of the material. Perceiving a link to the company's first big hit with Franco and Vernon, *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, Lesoeur insisted on incorporating footage from that film as 'flashbacks' to Usher's past, along with new scenes and dialogue designed to swerve the plotline into Orloff territory. The fact that these flashbacks were in black and white did not deter him! The arrangement was just like old times: as with *Le miroir obscène* and *The Hot Nights of Linda* back in 1973, Franco reluctantly agreed to direct the new scenes because he knew that if he didn't, Eurociné would simply pay someone else to do so. For the new material, Eurociné regular Olivier Mathot was drafted in to play Usher/Orloff's servant Morpho, and Françoise Blanchard played Orloff's catatonic daughter Melissa. These scenes, depicting Morpho carrying bodies into a subterranean chapel where Melissa lies waiting for her blood transfusions, were shot in a basement jazz club in Paris called Le Caveau de la Huchette. Despite the effort, she revives for just a few seconds each time. For years Franco had shown Orloffian madmen struggling to revive catatonic daughters/wives/mothers, using skin grafts, blood transfusions or the life essence of hookers; here we actually see the patient revive and react to her surroundings; what a shame that Howard Vernon was not around to see it! The resulting film is less than successful artistically, undermining the integrity of Franco's original vision, but at least it made it onto video, turning up as *Névrose* in France, *Die Rache des Hauses Usher* in Germany, and *Revenge in the House of Usher* in the USA. However, by 1988 the days of cinema releases for such off-the-wall exploitation items were over.

Problematica: Both 'Zombie 5' and 'Revolt of the House of Usher' have long been cited as alternative titles on IMDb, but despite regular searches I have been unable to find evidence that these titles ever applied to Franco's film, with the exception of a US video release bearing the title *Revenge in the House of Usher* with the words 'Zombie 5' in small letters beneath. Was this ever used as the topline retitling? I've yet to see evidence. Note: *Killing Birds: Raptors* (1987, dir: Claudio Lattanzi) was released on DVD in the USA as *Zombie 5*.



DIAMONDS OF KILIMANDJARO

(English-language title)

France & Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-2.637-1983

French visa no: 56485

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

El tesoro de la diosa blanca (SP) *The Treasure of the White Goddess*

Les diamants du Kilimandjaro (FR)

Alternative titles

Mondo Cannibale Teil 4 (GER onscreen trailer title)

Diana la sauvageonne (Eurociné poster) *Diana the Young Savage*

African Saalistajat (FIN video) *African Predators*

O thisavros tis lefkis theas aka **Ο θησαυρος της λευκης θεας**
(GRE DVD) *Treasure of the White Goddess*

Unconfirmed titles

Banga la déesse noire (CNC archive document)

Banga, the Black Goddess

Bamga Black Goddess (export title?)

Treasure of the White Goddess (export title?)

Production companies

Elite Films (Madrid)

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Laurenfilm, S.A. (Spain)

Venus Films S.A. (Spain) poster

Unreleased theatrically in France

Timeline

Shooting date	circa November	1982
Depósito legal number	25 January	1983
Madrid	18 July	1983
Barcelona	14 January	1985
French visa issued	26 February	1988

Theatrical running time

Spain (<i>El tesoro de la diosa blanca</i>)	91m
France (<i>Les diamants du Kilimandjaro</i>)	93m

video and DVD running times (converted where necessary)

SP 'Valfer' PAL VHS (<i>El tesoro de la diosa blanca</i>)	86m48s
US 'Shriek Show' NTSC DVD (<i>Diamonds of Kilimandjaro</i>)	95m12s

Note: The Spanish Ministry of Culture lists the debut Spanish release as Madrid, 3 June 1983, but this is not borne out by my press sources.

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'C. Plaut' in French version]. executive producer for Elite Films: **Rogelio López Fernández**. screenplay by **Jess Franco**. based on the novel "Fuego cruzado" by **Edison Marshall** [as 'Edison Marschal']. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa M. Almirall']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz** [as 'Enrique Diez']. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. editor: **Laura Arias**. music: **Jess Franco** [as 'J. Franco'] and **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. music recording: **Regson** (Madrid). laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording: **Arcofón**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Credits for the Eurociné cut ("Les Diamants du Kilimandjaro"): director: '**C. Plaut**' [**Olivier Mathot**]. executive producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. screenplay: **A.L. Mariaux**. music: **Daniel White**. script supervisor: **Iлона Kunesova**. special effects: **Sois Company**. titles: **C. Rappilly**. laboratory: **Éclair**.

Cast: **Katja Bienert** (Diana De Winter). **Aline Mess** (Nobah, tribal Priestess). **Olivier Mathot** (Matthew, Hermione's nephew). **Lina Romay** (Hermione De Winter, Diana's mother). **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa' or 'Dan Villers'] (Daniel De Winter aka 'Big White Chief'). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Fred Pereira/Fred Ferrera). **Albino Graziani** (Peyton). **Mari Carmen Nieto** (Lida De Winter, Diana's sister). **Javier Maiza** (Rafael aka 'Rofo', jungle guide). **Daniel Katz** (helicopter pilot).

Synopsis: *A plane crashes, somewhere in Africa, presumably near Mount Kilimanjaro. The pilot is killed, but the two survivors, an old man called Mr. De Winter and his young daughter Diana, are rescued by a primitive tribe. Some time later, treasure hunter Fred Ferrera and his sidekick Payton arrive, searching for a cache of legendary gems the tribe are rumoured to possess. The hunters are captured, but before the tribespeople can kill them, they're saved by Diana, who is now their resident 'white goddess'. She allows the two men to leave, whereupon they return to 'civilisation' and inform Diana's dying mother that her daughter is still alive. Accompanied by Lida De Winter and Matthew, two money-grabbing relatives who stand to lose an inheritance if Diana returns, and the principled Rafael as guide, they head back to the jungle in search of Diana and the jewels...*

Production notes: Eurociné's Marius and Daniel Lesoeur were persistent and indefatigable when it came to hustling the international film markets, and to their credit they managed to carve out a role for themselves during the increasingly difficult business landscape of the 1980s, when many small film companies were going belly-up. Yet for Franco fans it can seem a bit of a mixed blessing, given that Eurociné tirelessly promoted some of Franco's worst efforts while his best work of the period languished unseen outside Spain. Their distribution of *The Cannibals*, *Oasis of the Zombies*, *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* and *Golden Temple Amazons* may

have been a triumph from a business standpoint, but by making these tatty and unconvincing films the most visible examples of Franco's output they contributed to his plummeting reputation in the 1980s. A good example is *El tesoro de la diosa blanca*, which Franco made for the Madrid-based Elite Films. The Lesoeurs bought it, and transformed it into a Eurociné production called *Les Diamants du Kilimandjaro* (aka *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*) with the addition of new scenes and a partial rescore. From the same Spanish company they also acquired Franco's moody minimalist tone poem *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*, turning it into *Névrose* (aka *Revenge in the House of Usher*) with the addition of copious black-and-white flashbacks to *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, and new scenes shot in Paris featuring Olivier Mathot. It's likely, given that both titles were originally bankrolled by Elite Films, that they were purchased as part of the same package, some time in 1984.

While filming *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* on location in the Canary Islands, Franco took the opportunity to shoot some additional scenes for his 1981 horror film *Oasis of the Zombies*, recasting two roles with Spanish actors to create a Spanish-language variant called *La tumba de los muertos vivientes*. *Oasis* star Javier Maiza was already on hand, playing *El tesoro de la diosa blanca*'s Rafael, so it was easy for him to reshoot his *Oasis* scenes (he plays the same character, called Blabert, opposite Henri Lambert in *Oasis* and Eduardo Fajardo in *Tumba*). The sandy palm-tree clearing seen towards the end of *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* had previously been used as the titular 'oasis of the zombies', so Franco shot new scenes there for *Tumba*, featuring Daniel Katz. Given that *La tumba de los muertos vivientes* was released in Spanish cinemas in March 1983, it must have been completed at least three months before that date, which gives us a November/December shooting period for both *Tumba* and *El tesoro de la diosa blanca*.

Review: Enough! Will someone *please* keep Jess Franco out of the jungle? Anyone who thinks that *The Cannibals* (1979) represents Franco at his worst has obviously never seen *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*, a story so devoid of excitement that one is soon pining for the quasi-psychedelic gristle-chewing of the earlier film. The plot here, concerning a posse of bounty-hunters scouring the jungle for lost teenager Katja Bienert, is interchangeable with *The Cannibals*, relying as it does on the tired racist trope of the white woman revered by jungle natives. Black cast members are shunted around like set decoration in a story which so poorly fetishises their 'exoticism' that it's hard to say which is more regrettable, the fetishisation or the ineptitude. With the exception of Aline Mess, who at least gets a few lines of dialogue, the black performers are interchangeable props for a retro charade concerning whiteness's fantasy of being stuck in the jungle with a bunch of superstitious 'darkies'. The presence of a deranged white authority figure who has set himself up in the jungle as a tribal overlord may feel like a nod to *Apocalypse Now* (1979), but if you're looking for a philosophical exploration of mankind's innate savagery, forget it: the underlying fantasy here is unreconstructed colonial bilge.

All of which is true, but a tad humourless. It should also be pointed out that the film's white imperial overlord is played by Franco's regular composer Daniel White, with a terrible Scottish accent, an introductory skirl of bagpipes on the soundtrack, and a tartan tam-o-shanter perched on his head. I wouldn't say this redeems what is in essence a dumb and embarrassing film, but it does make it harder to keep a straight face. When a conniving relative (Olivier Mathot) arrives at the jungle village to ingratiate himself with this Caledonian Colonel Kurtz, he brings – of course! – a bottle of whiskey; the only enticement that will tempt the grumpy Scot from his hut. (Franco is an equal opportunities stereotyper!) The hut is another laugh-out-loud detail – stuck together out of raffia matting and leopardskin wall hangings, it looks like something hurriedly assembled in producer Marius Lesoeur's back garden, which it almost certainly was!

The obvious box-office draw here is Katja Bienert, whose youthful beauty is no more diminished by this silly and uninvolved drama than it is by the few smears of mud which connote her jungle life. Whereas Bienert's tender age precludes her earlier Franco films from distribution in English-speaking markets, here she's eighteen, thus opening the way to a DVD release in the USA. She doesn't get involved in the film's meagre sexual activity, but she is topless much of the time. The film would have us believe that she lives in the trees, giving rise to some endearing scenes in which the actress tries gamely to swing from jungle creepers like a teenage girl Tarzan. The remaining softcore enticements include topless nudity from black actress Aline Mess (the only energetic performer in the film, playing an angry jungle priestess), and a single sex scene between Antonio Mayans and Mari Carmen Nieto (an unusually chaste affair, with not a pubic mound in sight).

The chief exploitable ingredient that you'd expect in a film like this is gory cannibal violence, but Franco typically offers far less than his peers in this area, piously avoiding the gristle except for a medium shot of Nobah waving a severed head. With no gut-ripping, no flesh-chewing, and no impalement of screaming Caucasians to liven things up à la Ruggero Deodato or Umberto Lenzi, all that's left to enjoy is some softcore boob-jiggling and a ragbag of 'bad film' pleasures which, though momentarily amusing, amounts to little more than you'd expect from just about any poorly made hack-job of the period.

Cast and crew: Juana de la Morena's abiding memory of this film is persuading Katja Bienert not to wear nail varnish (which would hardly be fitting for a female Tarzan living a primitive life in the jungle), only for the actress to slip away behind the trees and re-apply it when no one was looking!

Music: *Devil Hunter*'s score provides much of the jungle ambience, complete with distinctive "Tambala-wayy" tribal singing which sounds strangely like Jess himself. A recurrent synthesiser theme, first heard during the scene in which Lida enters Fred's hotel room at night, revisits a melodic motif from Jean-Michel Lorgère's 'Equilibrium', as heard in *Sinner, Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. The title theme from *La noche de los sexos abiertos* reappears during the

pre-jungle expedition briefing, while the confrontation between Nobah and Diana at the climax of the film borrows an expensive-sounding orchestral cue from Franco's 1968 film *The Blood of Fu Manchu*. Given that composer Daniel White stars here, perhaps the recycling of this cue settles the question of whether *The Blood of Fu Manchu* was scored by White (as the English credits say) or Gert Wilden (as claimed by the German credits).

Locations: *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* was shot in Gran Canaria. The Beverly Park Hotel, where Mayans, Graziani and Mathot scheme before heading off into the 'jungle', is located in Playa del Ingles, forty kilometres from Las Palmas. Some time in 1983, additional shooting on the outskirts of Paris provided the material for Eurociné's French and English-language version, *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*: one location, a sandy area bounded by trees and bushes, looks familiar from other Eurociné projects like *Panther Squad* (Pierre Chevalier, 1984) and *Maniac Killer* (Andrea Bianchi, 1987), not to mention Franco's next jungle jape, *Golden Temple Amazons* (1983).

Connections: The credits for *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* declare that the film is based on a novel called "Fuego cruzado" ('Crossfire') by 'Edison Marschal'. This would seem to be a reference to Edison Marshall (1894-1967), a writer of pulp fiction best known for his novel *The Viking*, filmed in 1958 by Richard Fleischer as *The Vikings*, starring Kirk Douglas. Although I can find no evidence of a Marshall novel called 'Fuego cruzado' or 'Crossfire', there is another which fits the bill: *Dian of the Lost Land* (1935), about a 'lost world' in the Antarctic whose tribal denizens are related to the palaeolithic Cro-Magnons. Their ruler, Dian (sic), is a benevolent priestess-queen whom the tribe revere as a living goddess. She is in fact Caucasian, the daughter of a man from a lost expedition that once came to the region ... Even more so than *Dian of the Lost Land*, *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* is Franco's spin on a pair of German adventure films which enjoyed international success in the 1950s: *Liane, das Mädchen aus dem Urwald* aka *Liane, Jungle Goddess* (1956), and *Liane: Die Weisse Sklavin* aka *Jungle Girl and the Slave* (1957). In the first of these films, a German expedition is attacked in the jungle by a tribe of natives. Their lives are saved by the arrival of Liane, a beautiful young white girl wearing a skimpy bikini, whom the natives revere as a goddess. The explorers capture her and take her back to civilisation where it turns out she's the granddaughter of a German millionaire. A greedy nephew who expects to inherit the rich man's millions plots to get rid of Liane by any means necessary. In the second film, a posse of rich relatives head into the jungle to track down Liane, before she's abducted by slave traders ... The decision to reach back to such an old-fashioned style of film was almost certainly inspired by the contemporary success of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg's 1981 hit *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which took as its primary model the sort of Saturday matinée adventure serials popular in American cinemas in the 1930s and 1940s. Ferdinando Baldi's widely sold *Raiders of the Lost Ark* rip-off *Treasure of the Four Crowns* (1983), about a group of professional thieves who steal gems from a magical cave, may also

have influenced Eurociné's decision to purchase *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* ... Hugging his cache of gems, Daniel White paraphrases Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings*: "So, he wants my precious, eh? Well, he won't get it!" ... In perhaps the most eye-catching scene in *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*, the natives don masks which look incredibly like the cadaverous ghouls in Amando de Ossorio's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* and its sequels. Did Franco borrow the masks from Ossorio (who designed them himself), and if so, why couldn't he have found something more vivid and arresting to do with them? It's a pity they weren't available a few months earlier for Franco's Ossorio-inspired horror tale *Mansion of the Living Dead* ... Is 'Fred Pereira' short for Alfredo Pereira, making this another case for Franco's perennial private eye 'Al Pereira'?

Other versions: There are two different versions of this film, each including footage not present in the other: the Spanish version, *El tesoro de la diosa blanca*, which is Franco's original cut; and the French version *Les diamants du Kilimandjaro*. Eurociné bought *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* but insisted on several new sequences and some changes to the existing material. The additional footage clarifies the plot, while the changes are designed to replace Franco's utterly illogical depiction of De Winter's jungle hideaway, which in *Tesoro* contains a spiral staircase, electric lighting and checkered enamel tiles! (Franco simply shot the scenes for the cave interior in a dimly lit hotel, probably a bar or the anteroom to the hotel toilets!) Evidently this was too ludicrous even for Eurociné, who insisted on reshoots to give the 'great white chief' a raffia straw hut instead. The twelve minutes of new material is as follows:

1. A plane flies over the jungle before crashing (economically) into the undergrowth, resulting in the death of the pilot (Katz). The plane's two passengers, Daniel De Winter (White) and a small female child, emerge to find a group of natives gathered around them, prostrated in worship of their new 'gods'. (2m27s)
2. Matthew (Mathot) and Lida (Nieto) plot together in a hotel bedroom. (0m52s)
3. Daniel De Winter emerges from a grass hut. (12s)
4. Fred Pereira (Mayans) and Lida have sex in a hotel room. This scene runs for longer in *Diamonds* than *Tesoro*. (45s)
5. After Peyton (Graziani) fires at a group of natives, three of them run to their village and alert the others. Their priestess Nobah (Mess) tells them they must fight the intruders, while Daniel De Winter observes from behind her. (1m26s)
6. At the tribal village, a group of natives sit in a circle and play music while Nobah dances. (1m45s)
7. The first encounter between the search party and Daniel De Winter employs newly shot cutaways replacing the cave mouth with the grass hut, plus a scene in the hut replacing a similar scene in the cave in *Tesoro*. (2m26s)
8. Shots substituting the grass hut interior for the cave interior, during the scene in which Pereira robs the sleeping De Winter's jewel stash. (15s)

9. Nobah sees Pereira escaping and runs to the village to summon the tribe. (1m08s)
10. Nobah speaks with De Winter outside his hut, thanking him for killing Pereira and admitting that she is motivated by hatred for whites, who seek only to occupy and destroy the jungle. She plays along with De Winter's 'Great White Chief' fantasy because "*the old gods were dead*" and she needs something new to motivate her people. (1m05s)

Tesoro also features material entirely missing from *Diamants*. Some of it is fairly insignificant (footage of Rafael wandering through the bushes after leaving the expedition, for instance). More importantly, the climactic confrontation between Nobah and Diana leads to a completely different ending. In both films, Nobah reveals to Diana that Pereira stole her father's jewels while Pereira, tied to a nearby tree, watches helplessly. In *Tesoro*, the two women then engage in a fight to the death to decide Pereira's fate: the priestess wants to kill him, Diana wants to forgive him. Nobah clubs Diana to the ground and is about to deliver the killing blow when Daniel De Winter steps from the shadows and shoots the priestess dead. Having thus consolidated his rule over the tribe by removing the fractious Nobah, Daniel consoles Diana. The two return to 'their people' while Pereira is allowed to go free. The film ends with Pereira walking away through the palm trees. In *Diamants*, however, this entire sequence is drastically re-edited. The fight between the two women is removed (perhaps because it looks so feeble and absurd?), and instead of Daniel shooting Nobah, the cutting arranges for him to shoot Pereira in the back. (We don't see the impact, nor do we see Pereira fall; it's all done with cutaways, audio overdubs, and reaction shots.) Daniel consoles his distraught daughter, telling her that Pereira would have brought more outsiders back to the village in search of the jewels, and the lovelorn girl simply skips off into the jungle.

LILIAN (LA VIRGEN PERVERTIDA)

(Spanish theatrical title) *Lilian (the Virgin Corrupted)*

Spain 1982

depósito legal no: M-6.871-1983

Alternative title

Liliana (original 36-page script title)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date	November	1982
Depósito legal number	28 February	1983
Madrid	25 June	1984
Barcelona	17 September	1984
Seville	05 December	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain	79m
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DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Interviú' PAL DVD	75m36s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brawn']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz** [as 'J. Enrique Díaz']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. Music recording: **Eurosonic**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Katja Bienert** (Lilian). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Mario Pereira). **Emilio Linder** (Jorge Miranda, crime boss and pimp). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Mamie Kaplan'] (Olga, a prostitute at the nightclub). **José Llamas** (José, Miranda's servant). **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] (Chief of police). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Irina, nightclub owner). **Rosa M Martín** [as 'Rosa Stadner'] (Mara, blonde prostitute who gives evidence to Pereira). *Uncredited*: **Jess Franco** (Bernardo). **Fata Morgana** (barmaid at the nightclub). **Mari Carmen G. Alonso** [as 'C. Alonso'] (older woman in S&M stage act with Irina). **Genoveva Ojeda/Eva Palmer** (curly-haired girl in S&M stage act with Irina).

Synopsis: *Canaveras, Spain: A young German girl called Lilian falls unconscious on a stretch of lonely beach. Mario Pereira, a cop, drives her to a rural police outpost where he works with his friend Bernardo. The two men tend to the traumatised girl, coaxing her to explain what happened. In flashbacks, we see that Lilian fell in with a charming, wealthy couple, Jorge Miranda and Irina, who drugged her and ravished her before initiating her into their sleazy nightclub where she was expected to satisfy the customers' depraved lusts...*

Production notes: *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* was originally shot by Franco, circa November 1982, as an erotic thriller for the S-rated market. Unfortunately, by the time it was ready for release in 1984, Spanish censorship law had changed. Films with softcore erotic content, which used to be classified 'S' certificate for general release, were now included in the newly created 'X' certificate

bracket, and could only be shown in designated 'Sala X' theatres (see *Una rajita para dos*). Such venues were disinclined to book a film if it didn't offer the fully explicit material which audiences expected from 'X' certificate films, so the comparatively mild *Lilian* had to be 'beefed up' to match the new criteria. Consequently, in the early months of 1984, Franco shot fifteen minutes of new material to turn *Lilian* into a hardcore film. In the process, several scenes from the original version were dropped to avoid the running time exceeding the average for 'X' certificate bookings. (This material later made its way into *Las chuponas*, a hardcore film with softcore inserts which Franco made for Fervi Films in 1985.) The revamped *Lilian* played its first Sala-X show at the Oxford in Madrid, in June 1984.

Review: *Lilian, la virgen pervertida* is another bounce around the Sadean echo chamber, starring Katja Bienert as a young girl fleeing from a pair of cruel mindbenders who have ensnared her in a mire of drugs and depravity. It begins abruptly, as Bienert stumbles into a bedroom to find a young couple (José Llamas and Lina Romay) munching at each other's nether regions in the sixty-nine position, and if this hardcore scene feels odd it's because it was added a year later, after a change in the law made Franco's softcore version unsellable (see above). The film really begins a minute or two later, with some deliciously moody shots of Bienert running naked across rolling sand dunes at sunset...

Lilian's chief problem is over-familiarity: yet another story about an innocent girl sexually exploited by an amoral couple. The film is a miasma of familiar ideas and images, further enhanced by the use of musical cues from earlier movies. We know these faces, we know these places, we know these sights and sounds. Yet it's a 'problem' that Franco devotees may regard as a bonus, since the net effect is simply to extend, by one more film, the reverberating echo-chamber of his cinema. *Lilian* lacks originality but it's still very enjoyable: it's another languid dip in Franco's whirlpool bath of imagery. You want one of Jess's hallucinogenic sex scenes? *Lilian* is drugged and ravished to the accompaniment of heavily treated gasps and moans on the soundtrack, leading to yet another zonked-out flagellation scene. Lina Romay plays a brothel madame called Irina, the sobs and moans of the victims rise and fall, until *Lilian* begins to feel like a remix of the director's greatest hits, a disco mash-up of his favourite situations. Sexual sadism as comfort food? Only in the strange and dizzying world of Jess Franco...

In deference to Katja Bienert's tender years, the hardcore aspect of *Lilian's* ravishment is achieved via close-ups of another actress. (At least they were shot on the same film stock, which is more than can be said for earlier soft/hard combos like *Sexorcisme*, *Les Avaleuses* and *Le miroir obscène*). Lina Romay, ever the trouper, dives in for the hardcore close-ups, lapping sperm from an ejaculating penis (her co-star in the scene, Emilio Linder, appears not to have been directly involved). Among the other actors to 'let it all hang out' in the sexual scenes is José Llamas, by now an indispensable member of the Franco team. Here he plays the bisexual José,

Lilian's supposed friend and confidante, who turns out to be just as corrupt as the others. We see him tied up and sexually humiliated in a nightclub sex show presided over by Irina, who whips and fellates him before spreading her pussy and putting on a lesbian floor-show into the bargain. *Lilian* watches, stoned and detached, unable to process what she's seeing. It's all mildly kinky, though hints of anal intrusion with the handle of a whip are left offscreen, suggesting that even at the dawn of a brave new world for Spanish porn there were still a few sexual frontiers Franco hesitated to transgress. Later we see Daniel White, fresh from his supporting role with Bienert in *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*, playing a corrupt police chief who hangs out at Irina's club to watch *Lilian* being whipped and molested. As he does so, José Llamas steps behind him and caresses his shoulder, giving us the highly unusual impression of two sadistic gay men enjoying a lesbian S&M show with oodles of 'split-beaver' cunnilingus. As I said before, only in the world of Jess Franco...

It's worth noting, as we hit the mid-1980s period of Franco's career, that the director's pose as an amoral libertine is beginning to slip, and the issue that provokes this presentational crisis is drugs. *Lilian*, like several other Franco films of the period, sees him expressing genuine distaste regarding drug-taking and drug dealers. It's a train of thought we can trace back to *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* (1972), but in the 1980s films it becomes an ever-present rumble of criticism, culminating in the preachy and decidedly conservative cop drama *Downtown Heat* (1990). Perhaps Franco saw friends, cast-members and acquaintances getting into difficulty with drugs at the time? In *Lilian*, the central character has been dosed up with heroin in order to make her submit to the villainous Jorge and Irina. Naturally, the perpetrators of such abuse are portrayed as disgusting human beings, but Mario Pereira (Mayans) and his concerned but cowardly confederate Bernardo (played by Franco himself) are given to moralistic diatribes about drugs even before it becomes obvious that *Lilian* was forced to take them against her will. "It's monstrous what drugs will do to someone," says Bernardo as *Lilian* struggles to speak, and "I don't understand anyone any more. A girl so innocent, so beautiful, so pure... Why were you using drugs?" Heroin is explicitly designated as the drug being used, but while there's no doubt that heroin is destructive and best avoided, it has to be said that Franco's attitude was the same to all mood-altering substances: their effects are portrayed in his films as, at the very least, an inducement to idiocy, or at worst actively dangerous. This sits uneasily with the fact that Franco's imagery draws obsessively on a sense of dislocation, dissociation, timelessness, erotic suspension, disorientation and delirium. For someone so dedicated to conjuring these sensations to simultaneously dismiss the drug experience as worthless, smacks of pusher's envy. However, the theme doesn't receive detailed scrutiny in *Lilian*; all that we hear about the subject amounts to a couple of terse sentences. Faced with a liaison between corrupt authorities and wicked drug dealers, Mario Pereira turns vigilante and blows Jorge Miranda away, sticking a bullet in his servant

José for good measure. Yet neither the ‘brush-it-under-the-carpet’ superior who forbade Pereira’s investigation, nor the corrupt chief of police himself, are deemed worthy of payback by Franco’s script, which grinds to a dead halt after the double shooting.

Such a moralistic climax sees Franco performing a 180-degree turn from his Sadean tales such as *How to Seduce a Virgin* or *Eugenie*. Where those stories stood back and observed the amoral actions of Sadean protagonists, the only moral proviso being that such a lifestyle means waving goodbye to any kind of human closeness or trust, here we see a far more conservative approach, in which fantasies of ‘saving the innocent’ lead to vigilante justice. Mario Pereira kills two men purely on the accusations of Lilian, a young woman stoned out of her mind on heroin, and Mara, an ex-lover who’s been spurned by the accused. “*Getting the girl to talk was easy. She hated Miranda for abandoning her,*” Pereira’s voice-over admits of the latter. Satisfied that he knows the truth, Pereira acts as judge, jury and executioner, a move that puts things in the same fantasy bag as the films of Michael Winner. Of course, we the audience see flashbacks depicting as true what Lilian and Mara say. Indeed these flashbacks show much more, including things they could not have known: private conversations between the evildoers, for instance. The flashbacks are thus special pleading, ‘proving’ to the audience that the victims’ claims are true. Pereira, however, does not have the luxury of viewing this ‘proof’; all he has to go on are the disconnected mumblings of a deeply stoned teenager, and the testimony of a woman with an emotional axe to grind. That he then decides to become a moral avenger and grants himself the right to kill is one thing (if that’s the kind of man he is, so be it): for the filmmaker to assert his approval of the avenger, though, is quite another. *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* climaxes with Pereira’s act of vengeance, and despite the unseemly haste of the staging, his actions are depicted squarely in the ‘heroic’ tradition of cops who assert justice when the system will not.

Qualms about Franco’s moralising aside, *Lilian* is a more than agreeable effort that will caress the corpuscles of devoted Franco addicts in need of their next ‘fix’. Searching through the lower echelons of the Franco filmography, you may happen upon it one day when you’ve already seen the best titles, and if so you will probably feel glad for its cosy inebriate melancholy. For anyone new to Franco who wonders what all the fuss is about, it will probably send out the wrong signals. From its crudely imposed porno beginning to its hilariously perfunctory heroic ending, *Lilian* is too simplistic to be anyone’s idea of great cinema, but it nevertheless carries the scent of that mad allure which overwhelms the senses in films like *Macumba Sexual* and *Gemidos de placer*. You may ask what’s the point, if we’ve been through it all before, but if ever a director could convey the bitter-sweet pleasure of repetition as it hovers between delight and disappointment, it’s Jess Franco...

Franco on screen: At the risk of stating the blindingly obvious, Franco clearly desires Katja Bienert. His camera dwells upon her face and breasts so devotedly it’s as if he’s kissing her through the lens. In *Lilian* he personifies his fascination by playing Agent

Bernardo, whose role is to wince sympathetically as the traumatised girl recounts the degradations she has suffered. In a key scene, he gazes raptly at her nude body as if on the verge of touching her, wanting to enjoy her young flesh. Then, with a hangdog look of shame, he averts his gaze and wanders away, sitting behind his desk clutching a bottle of Malibu; sweaty, frustrated and disgusted with himself. It’s a role that embodies one of the binary forces propelling Franco’s vision of desire. Time and time again he allows sorrow and sympathy to creep into his depictions of rape, sexual exploitation and licentious amorality: one thinks of *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, *Sinner*, *Julietta 69*, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, films in which the savouring of cruelty gives way to tenderness in the depiction of beauty assailed.

Music: The credit sequence features a sad, spooky number called “Big Sister”, which can be found on the Daniel J. White library LP *Mood Music Selection No. 1: Cocktail*. A piece for guitar and bass, with wordless female vocals in the Ornela Vanoni tradition, it is gradually overlaid with a melody for ARP and electric piano from the *Macumba Sexual* sessions. A similar but cheerier piece called “Voix de velours”, which accompanies Lilian’s recollections of her dalliance with José, is lifted from *Ambiance*, an earlier Daniel White LP possibly released in 1971. (The fact that it contains music recorded for Franco films pre-1971 casts doubt on this date, but it’s possible that White retained copyright on his scores for the Towers films and simply resold them to the library LP companies he worked for.) And let’s hear it for “Sexy Rock”, a bouncy, perky number enjoying its debut outing here. Cheesy yet irresistible, this toe-tapper enlivens the first nightclub scene and will go on to become a mainstay of Franco’s films in the next three or four years. The rest of the score includes “Bass profonde” from White’s *Mystère Bleuté* album, “Voix de velours” from *Ambiance*, and two more tracks from *Mood Music Selection No. 1: Cocktail*, “Magic Violins” and “Barbara Cool”; the former a sombre and spellbinding string arrangement used in 1973’s *Female Vampire*, the latter a jaunty jazz number for trumpet and piano.

Locations: Antonio Mayans reports that the film was made partly in the Canary Islands.

Connections: Lilian’s rescue after fleeing from her captors recalls *La comtesse perverse*, and a scene in which she’s drugged during a friendly mealtime chat on an outdoor terrace recalls *Plaisir à trois* and *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (1969). The nightclub setting, and the theme of a girl pressed into slavery at a brothel-cum-sex-club, recalls an earlier Bienert-Franco team-up, *Linda* (1981), as well as the Dietrich-era production *Die Sklavinnen* (1975) ... Emilio Linder, the Nigel Havers lookalike who ravages Bienert, went on to appear in Franco’s *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espía?* and from there to a varied career in Spanish TV ... A substantial amount of material filmed during the *Lilian* shoot eventually found its way into *Las chuponas*, a hardcore/softcore hybrid which Franco pulled together in 1985. Whether these scenes were part of his original version of *Lilian*, before being cut to make way for the hardcore scenes, is unclear. See *Las chuponas* for more details.



NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND DESIRES

UK/US Blu-ray title)

Spain 1983

depósito legal no: M-6.870-1983

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Mil sexos tiene la noche

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Francisco Gratacos Matamaza

Mediterraneo Films (source: IMDb)

Timeline

Shooting date	January	1983
Depósito legal number	28 February	1983
Seville	11 May	1983
Barcelona	15 August	1983
Cartagena	28 November	1983
Madrid	05 March	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain	93m
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Blu-ray running time

US 'Mondo Macabro' NTSC Blu-ray	91m41s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music recording: **Estudios Technisonic**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Daniel Katz**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Irina). **Daniel Katz** (Fabian). **Carmen Carrión** (Lorna). **Albino Graziani** (Ahmed, the first victim). **Mauro Ribera** [as 'Mauro Rivera'] (male victim at dope party). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Mamie Kaplan'] (dope party girl #1). **Alicia Príncipe** (dope party girl #2). **José Llamas** (last victim). **Jess Franco** (Dr. Harmon, a psychiatrist).

Synopsis: *Irina, a pretty young nightclub entertainer, performs a blindfolded mind-reading and telemetry act with her lover, the Great Fabian. During the show, Fabian is disquieted by the presence of a man in the audience whom he seems to know. The man hands him a message*

on a piece of paper for Irina to read, using her psychic powers. It says "You have a few hours to live". Fabian dismisses the man as a joker, but later, at the couple's hotel room, he's scared and depressed. That night, Irina dreams that she's ravished by the man at the club and his two female friends, until a voice uttering strange incantations scares them off and sends Irina into convulsions. Waking suddenly to find Fabian asleep, Irina leaves the hotel and enters a strange Moroccan-style beach house, where a regal woman called Lorna silently greets her with a kiss... Also present, unbeknownst to Irina, is Fabian. He and Lorna plan to use Irina as a psychically controlled puppet to rid them of their enemies. The first victim is a nightclub pianist whom she visits in his hotel room and stabs to death. The next day Fabian convinces her that the strange experience she describes was just a vivid dream. The following day Irina again finds herself at a party with the man who gave Fabian the note. After everyone get stoned, she kills him and his two female friends. Fabian sends Irina to a psychiatrist, Dr. Harmon, who quizzes her about the confusion she feels between dreams and reality. Soon, Irina is despatched on a third mission of murder; this time a young man with whom she enjoys a romantic afternoon, before returning to his hotel room and stabbing him. Back in her own hotel room, Irina regains consciousness to find a gore-streaked knife and blood on her hands. Fabian has disappeared, so she must return, fully conscious at last, to the strange house by the sea...

Production notes: With Golden Films prepared to finance any notion that flitted through Franco's mind, as long as it could be shot for a fistful of pesetas, production in 1983 continued apace. The year saw another eleven films go into production, just one short of the twelve shot in 1982. Franco was aided in this mad rush to production by a stable and reliable repertory cast and crew. Antonio Mayans was now firmly established, not just in front of the camera but as production manager, able to put the necessary components into place while Franco kept the ideas coming. A regular cast who lived in the south of Spain were available at the drop of a hat: along with the ever-dependable Lina Romay were Carmen Carrión, Mabel Escaño, Mari Carmen Nieto, José Llamas, Antonio Rebollo and Daniel Katz. Those behind the camera also became regulars in front of it; Juan Soler acted in several of the Golden Films titles, Antonio Mayans's wife Juana de la Morena, usually a makeup artist on the films, stepped before the lens a few times; and Ángel Ordiales, a camera assistant on numerous titles of the period, appeared almost as frequently in front of it. There were even a few roles for Franco's old friend Daniel White, who popped up several times as well as providing his catalogue of library music. However, all was not as healthy as it should have been. Due in part to Emilio Larraga's lack of experience in marketing, few of the Golden Films titles made it onto video shelves, much less cinemas, outside of Spain. Only two – *Macumba Sexual* and *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* – received any kind of release abroad by 1985. Consequently, despite his fevered productivity, Franco's income was starting to decline. It didn't help that the films were made so very cheaply, and with little thought given to market realities. Times were getting tougher: the bottom was falling

out of the independent horror film market, videotaped porn was robbing cinemas of the dirty-mac brigade, and the legalisation of hardcore pornography in Spain rendered Franco's preferred 'hard softcore' excursions old-hat as cinemagoers demanded something more explicit.

Very early in 1983 (or possibly late 1982), Jess Franco shot two 'S' certificate films back-to-back: *Mil sexos tiene la noche* and *Historia sexual de O*. They were registered officially, along with their immediate predecessor *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, and the three films were issued with consecutive Deposit numbers.

Review: Revisiting one of Franco's favourite story ideas – a woman compelled to kill while under malicious psychic control – *Mil sexos tiene la noche* (aka *Night Has a Thousand Desires*) stands tall alongside forebears such as *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, *Nightmares Come at Night* and *Shining Sex*. Its brand of minimalist dreaminess is closest in tone to the latter, and although it lacks that film's total commitment to the delirious it's still pretty far out. With a small cast and very little narrative, Franco summons his characteristic aura of time suspended and reality slipped out of joint.

Paranoia, isolation, emptiness: these are the feelings conveyed by Franco, using little more than artful shot composition, lucid sharp-edged photography and carefully chosen locations. At this point in his career Franco requires no artsy lenses, rapid editing or swirling opticals to warp our minds. Everything here is the result of measured pacing, an obsessive meditation on faces and bodies, and a commitment to the relationship between music and image which takes him far from the mundane realm of language and narrative. He allows the elements of this meagre plot to diminish in their details, leaving the audience to sink or swim. While the technique on display is undeniable, it's also dependent on the viewer's ability to put aside their thirst for information, to suspend dramatic expectations as readily as one would suspend disbelief. Scenes play out slowly, the editing weighs each moment, and the image frequently consists of nothing more overtly psychedelic than the faces or bodies of the cast. Two-thirds of the running time has no dialogue at all. Yet out of such a narrow range of cinematic tools, Franco fashions something weird and amazing. The 'story' could be told in a quarter of the time, but then the same could be said of a melody. You can always play a tune faster, but while harmonic relationships would remain the same you'd lose the mood. And it is mood, more than anything else, that Franco cares about.

One scene in particular, running just under fifteen minutes, resonates with all that is preternatural in Franco's cinema. The setting is a swingers' sex party which the heroine, Irina, attends, with the unconscious intention of murdering the other three guests. A joint is passed round. Time elasticates, and in those two words lies all that is avant-garde and delightful in his cinema. Slowly, Irina enters into a sexual foursome with the others, her expression completely detached. Franco's languorous camera follows her, adopting a hallucinatory perspective by ascending to the ceiling to gaze at the etiolated action below...

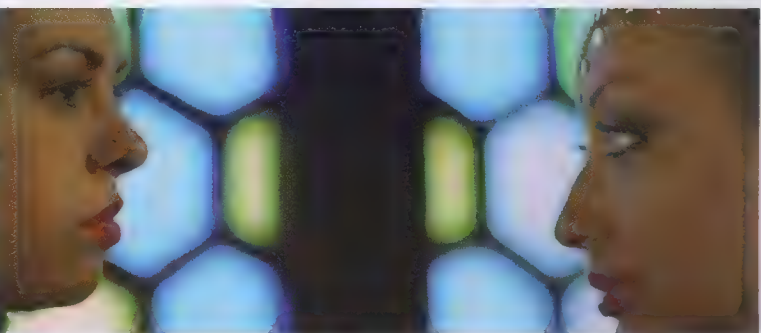
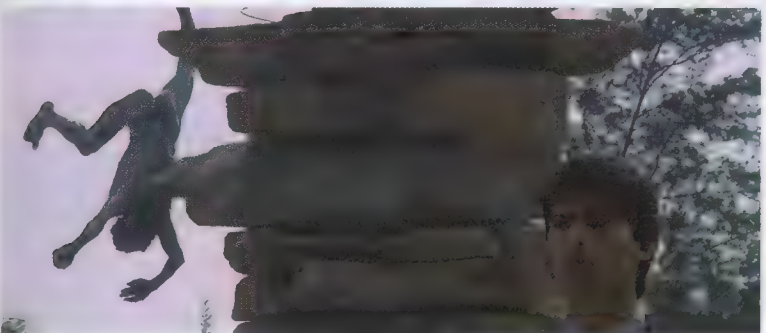
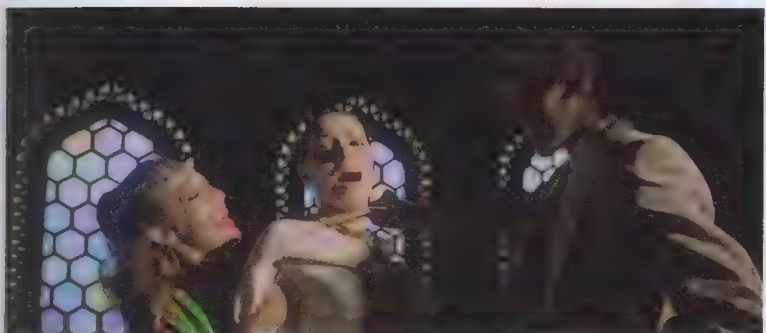
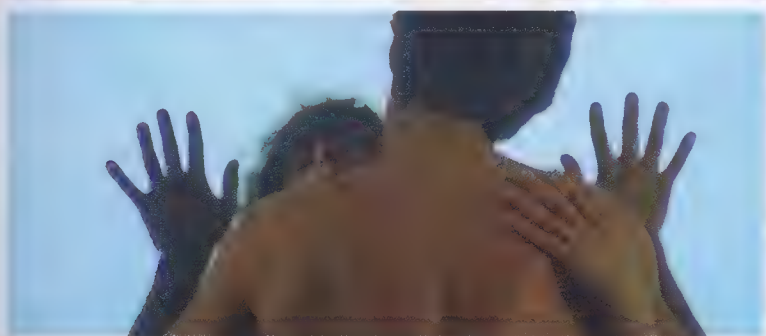
Throughout the scene there's an incredible cacophony of bizarre twangs, thuds and wails on the soundtrack, like John Cage embroiled in a fight to the death with the contents of a kitchen cupboard. When the scrabbling atonal soundscape has achieved maximum listener-unfriendliness, the film lurches further into the mad and absurd with the introduction of a metallic audio-filter that warps the moans and sighs of Lina Roday, whose position at this juncture – head between the legs of a fellow actress – gives the bizarre impression that she's creating these extraordinary sounds by blowing across the other woman's labia like a flute. Franco persists with this situation for several minutes, and one is left to marvel as he surrenders any sense of sexual intimacy to the dictates of a plunge into madness. Quite what the average cinema punter looking for sexy frolics on a Saturday afternoon would have made of it is anyone's guess!

Other scenes exude a casually oneiric quality that feels imported from the edge of drug delirium (or Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*). Irina enjoys a romantic tryst with a young man (played by José Llamas) in what looks to be a miniature park located in the middle of a traffic roundabout. After a silent communion at an outdoor café, surrounded by a sea of empty chromium chairs, the two return to a hotel room for sex, and there follows another of Franco's mesmeric exercises in sexual disorientation...

What's striking and unsettling is that the camera relentlessly disengages the two 'lovers' even as they press against each other. Irina paws at the young man, while he leans against the window, palms pressed against the glass. As the scene continues, one finds it hard to distinguish quite where the couple are, physically, in relation to each other. At times, it seems as if they're on opposite sides of the glass, with Roday's hands impossibly entering the room from outside, below the camera frame, to fondle Llamas's buttocks. As an expression of alienation in the very heart of intimacy it's both disturbing and astonishing. Time and again in his films, Franco brings a concentrated attention to bear upon scenes that other filmmakers in the sexploitation/horror genres would either gloss over or define with easy-to-read visuals. It's in the lingering, zoned-out miasma of Franco's intensely voyeuristic camerawork that we encounter the essence of his cinema. The alchemy takes place in an abstract zone, almost always without dialogue, in which Franco's esoteric sensibility meshes with his all-consuming camera gaze, conjuring up a confluence between humid visions of the flesh and a world of mad hallucination.

Franco on screen: Franco appears in a small role as Dr. Harmon, the psychiatrist.

Music: Five pieces of music used in *Mil sexos tiene la noche* ("Introspection No.1", "Introregard No.1", "Apocalypse No", "Dizzy Blues", and "Magic Violins") can be found on the Daniel J. White library LP *Mood Music Selection No.1: Cocktail*. The best of these, "Introspection No. 1", was previously rather wasted on a couple of scenes in the run-of-the-mill *Women Behind Bars* (1975), but here it sits perfectly with Franco's haunting visuals, and more than deserves its place as the title theme. The eerie "Introregard



No.1", which sounds to me like an out-take from the *Shining Sex* sessions, scores Irina's foreshadowing dream about sex with a group of people she will go on to kill, while the atonal freak-out "Apocalypse No" accompanies the drug party sequence and Irina's seduction of Ahmed. "Magic Violins" is the strings-only version of Irina's theme (from 1973's *La comtesse noire*) and it turns up several times in this film too, while "Dizzy Blues" can be heard at the club where Albino Graziani's character works as a pianist. In addition to these tracks, we hear "Basse profonde" from White's *Mystère Bleuté* album during Irina's rendezvous with José Llamas, and in the middle of the drug orgy we trip once more to the blurry bongos of *Devil Hunter* (1980). Mauro Ribera even taps his thigh in time with the jungle beat, suggesting that *Mil sexos tiene la noche* is set in a tantalising parallel universe where one can actually buy the *Devil Hunter* soundtrack LP.

Locations: The mysterious seaside villa featured in the film is the Castillo de Bil-Bil, an Arabic-style building in Benalmádena, twelve kilometres west of Málaga, Spain. Built in the thirties and designed by the architect Enrique Atencia, it's located by the sea on the Avenida Antonio Machado and is currently in use as a cultural centre ... As Irina sets off on the listless walk that will lead her to victim number three (José Llamas) we're back, once again, at the Hotel Santa Catalina in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria (see *Les Ébranlées* and *Ópalo de fuego*). Llamas and Romay rendezvous in a nearby park, the centrepiece of which is a curious sculpture, the Atis Tirma monument by Manuel Bethencourt Santana. Unveiled in 1981, it's a tribute to the earlier descendants of Gran Canaria, the Guanches, who leaped to their deaths from the mountains rather than surrender to Castilian rule.

Connections: The title parodies John Farrow's *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948) starring Edward G. Robinson as a clairvoyant who can see the future, and also perhaps refers to Juan Piquer Simón's 1982 slasher *Pieces*, which in Spain was called *Mil gritos tiene la noche* ("A Thousand Cries Has The Night"). I wonder whether Franco was teasing Piquer for 'borrowing' ideas from his horror hit *Bloody Moon* as well as cribbing from the title of his classic *Gritos en la noche* ("Cries in the Night")? ... Irina is reading *The Ivory Grin* by Ross MacDonald, one of the writer's series of hardboiled 'Lew Archer' thrillers. Since the detective plot of *The Ivory Grin* bears no relation to the story being told by Franco, we must assume it's the cover that appealed to his roving eye. It features a woman's lipsticked mouth with a medical scalpel gripped between her teeth, the blade dripping blood. Intercut with shots of Irina's mouth in tight close-up, and accompanied by music from *La comtesse noire*, the sum total could be said (rather like certain plot developments in *Mansion of the Living Dead*) to hark back to Irina's 'previous life' as a vampire in that central Franco text of the early 1970s, with the blood-dripping scalpel blade and juxtaposed woman's teeth suggesting displaced vampire imagery. Perhaps Irina is on some implacable karmic journey, the once-powerful killer Countess now reincarnated as the helpless stooge of a malign mesmerist?

UN PITO PARA TRES

(SP theatrical title)

Translation: *A Prick for Three*

Spain, 1983/1984

dépósito legal no: M-14.714-85

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

shooting date (first period)	January	1983
shooting date (second period)	circa late autumn	1984
Seville	22 June	1985
Madrid	08 July	1985
Barcelona	29 July	1985

Theatrical running time

Spain 77m

Other formats

PAL digital master (converted) 75m57s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Candy Coster']. camera assistant (1983 footage): **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Joan Soler']. [2nd] camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. music: **Fernando Garcia Morcillo** [as 'F.G. Morcillo']. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: writers: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**. director of photography: **Jess Franco**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**. executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] (Lulu, a porn star). **Daniel Katz** [as 'Pito Lungo']. **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Marina Lamete']. **Rosa María Minuner** ['Joan Parrus']. **Carmen Carrión** [as 'Fanny Clito']. **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Tomè Proculi'].

Synopsis: *Lulu, the famous porn star, in one of her famous reunions, tells her fellow party guests her shameless love experiences and those of her friends, to demonstrate that destitute women should these days do the craziest things to get exotic love: the different stories she tells include her strategy of posing as a male transvestite to seduce a gay man.*

Production notes: *Un pito para tres* is cinematic 'bubble-and-squeak', a meal made out of leftovers, with the added spice of hardcore inserts responding to the changing laws for Spanish sex films. It began life in 1983 as a softcore sex comedy in the style of *El hotel de los ligues*, shot simultaneously with *Mil sexos tiene la noche*.



Bula (Lina Romay) seduces Mari Carmen Nieto in the softcore-to-hardcore project *Un pite para tres*.

He's... and here was, in 1981, during the making of *Mil se los da de la noche*... but I didn't make it into that film... either because it didn't fit, or because Franco had always intended to use it elsewhere. In 1983 he continued it with more hardcore footage and sold the result to Fervi Films.

This early version of the film, title unknown, was never finished: one suspects it may have amounted to half an hour of footage at best. A year later, when the law changed and ‘S’ certificate films were forced to merge with the newly minted ‘X’ category, Franco took the same steps he’d taken with *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* and turned a softcore romp into an X-cert product with the addition of some tight close-ups of penetration and fellatio. It’s immediately obvious that these hardcore shots were filmed separately; the lighting, hair colour and skin tones are all different. Neither Daniel Katz nor Antonio Mayans perform sex in them; instead what we see is a semi-erect ‘stunt penis’, probably ‘on loan’ from José Llamas. *Un pito para tres* then sat unreleased for several months before receiving its first cinema screenings in Seville in June 1985.

Franco shot *Mil sexos tiene la noche* for Golden Films International, so it’s highly likely that he intended this ‘satellite production’ for them too. By late 1984, however, he had fallen out with the company, who were failing to pay him the money he was owed. Instead of giving the film to them, he came to an arrangement with Fervi Films majordomo Fernando Vidal Campos, who had financed the 1984 hardcore romp *Una rajita para dos* and would go on to release nearly all of Franco’s hardcore output in the next three years. Given that the title *Un pito para tres* (‘A Cock for Three’) is an obvious echo of *Una rajita para dos* (‘A Pussy for Two’), one supposes that when Campos saw how well *Una rajita para dos* was doing, he asked for a follow-up and so Franco set about creating one from his ‘slush-pile’ of unfinished work. Quite when the editing and dubbing took place is difficult to pinpoint accurately. Franco’s first two Spanish hardcore titles opened in the summer of ’84: *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* in June and *Una rajita para dos* in August, so my guess is that Franco assembled *Un pito para tres* in late 1984. (The available print comes with two different registration numbers: an ‘expediente número’ 346-84 N and a depósito legal number M-14.714-85.)

Complicating this timeline, some of the material in *Un pito para tres* dates back to before *Mil sexos tiene la noche*. The opening location footage of whitewashed buildings at dawn was filmed in Mojácar, an ancient hillside town in Almería which Franco filmed just once, for 1982’s *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emanuelle*. The shot of a stone balcony, seen from below, is a direct steal from that film. Adding to the confusion, Mari Carmen Nieto wears the same gold lamé tiger-skin outfit in *Un pito para tres* that Asunción Calero (aka ‘Ida Balín’) wore in *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emanuelle* – you can tell it was designed for the more buxom Calero as it keeps accidentally slipping off Nieto! There’s also a possible connection to 1982’s *Mansion of the Living Dead*, thanks to a sequence in which Antonio Mayans, playing a gay man, is seduced into bed by Lina Romay, posing as a transvestite, who then reveals to Mayans’s horror that she’s really a woman! Mayans’s dyed blond hair, plus the style in which it’s cut and his clean-shaven appearance, match exactly with his appearance in *Mansion of the Living Dead* – the only other Franco film in which he wore his hair this way. (Mayans tells me he’d just returned from shooting *Don Cipote de la Manga*, by

Gabriel Iglesias, having dyed his hair for that film.) If I’m correct, then the scene was shot speculatively by Franco during the making of *Mansion* for a possible future project that never materialised, and was then pressed into service for *Un pito para tres*.

Locations: Benalmádena and Mojácar, Spain.

Music: Cheery but banal cues by Fernando Garcia Morcillo predominate, alleviated for a precious few minutes by that lovely old standard “The Taste of Your Sperm” by Daniel J. White.

Connections: A scene in which Lina Romay appears unexpectedly at a hotel window while Daniel Katz is having sex with Mari Carmen Nieto, echoes the film Franco was making at the same time, *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, in which Romay appears supernaturally at the hotel window of a character played by Albino Graziani. The room itself is the same in both, and the items on the bedside table match too: the scenes were clearly shot on the same day.

Spanish theatrical release: *Un pito para tres* scored a fortnight’s bookings on the Sala X circuit in Seville and then afterwards for the same duration in Madrid. It was revived for a week twice during 1986 (February and October) and then again for a week in July 1989. In Barcelona it played for five consecutive weeks from July to September 1985.

THE SEXUAL STORY OF O
(UK DVD cover title)

Spain 1983

depósito legal no: M-6.872-1983

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Historia sexual de O

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date	January	1983
Depósito legal number	28 February	1983
Seville	29 April	1983
Date of approval	02 May	1983
Barcelona	17 October	1983
Madrid	20 February	1984
Cartagena	19 March	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain 95m

DVD running times (converted where necessary)

SP 'Interviú' PAL DVD	92m01s
US 'Severin' NTSC DVD	92m04s

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music recording: **Estudio Regson, Madrid**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Fujicolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **Alicia Príncipe** (Odile Stevens). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Mamie Kaplan'] (Mara). **Mauro Rivera** (Mario). **Carmen Carrión** (Princess Bombaqui). **Daniel Katz** (Prince Bombaqui).

Synopsis: *Odile, a beautiful young American tourist on vacation in Spain, is seduced by an attractive couple, Mario and Mara, who are staying at the same hotel. They befriend the naïve girl, drawing her into a ménage à trois before taking her to meet an aristocratic 'friend', the Princess Bombaqui, who lives on a nearby island. In truth, Mario and Mara are slave traders, selling Odile into bondage. Once on the island she is drugged and abused in sadistic and bizarre sex sessions with the Princess and her lover. Meanwhile, Mario, who has grown besotted with the girl, is having second thoughts about the transaction...*

Review: Shot in the same flurry of production as *Mil sexos tiene la noche* and *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, *The Sexual Story of O* is yet another visit to familiar Sadean territory. Beginning in a blissful summer rose garden, and climaxing with a woman being beaten to death with a spiked iron flail, it tells the sorry tale of Odile, a pretty but shallow young American girl holidaying in Spain, without friends or family, who attracts the attention of a predatory couple seeking vulnerable women to sell to a pair of sadists on a nearby island. Echoing 1973's *La comtesse perverse*, plus 1980's *Eugénie, historia de una perversion*, *The Sexual Story of O* is watchable enough, but it's very much a repeat performance of ideas Franco has already explored more successfully with better actors. Given that this is also true of *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* made immediately before, the feeling of diminishing returns is inescapable.

Alicia Príncipe's performance as 'Odile' (or Anna as the script carelessly refers to her a couple of times) is a tissue-paper sketch of innocence. She's a sweet but clueless child-woman hanging out in her hotel room watching adverts on TV, bouncing around on the furniture to jaunty pop music, and skim-reading Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, a book presumably left lying around the hotel, given how little else there is to support the idea that she's a student of American literature. The book's title of course will have more to do with her situation than she knows. As a portrait of corruption the film is not much more substantial than those five

words, although it does at least look beautiful, sharing the bright, summery, ultra-vivid photography of *Macumba Sexual* and *Mil sexos tiene la noche*. The trouble is, the scant information in this paragraph tells you all we ever learn about Odile, and unfortunately the actress's skills do not compensate.

Photographically handsome it may be, but for all the surface attraction this is a frustrating film. It doesn't play games with time and space, the way Franco's minimalist classics of the period do, and it certainly doesn't score very highly when it comes to shock value. Instead there's a lazy quality to the scenario. When Mario and Mara make love in full view of their victim's hotel window, they deliberately scream and gasp, playing up their lust to excite the watching youngster. But whatever illicit shock there might have been, seeing this 'innocent teenager' turned on by an obscene adult spectacle, is spoiled by the way the sequence is constructed and performed. Odile is seen only in repetitive, uninteresting, poorly framed shots, and she barely reacts to the spectacle at all. This lack of response is not a salient plot point, just bad direction. How hard could it have been for Príncipe to look up and show some stirrings of interest? While it's obvious she's supposed to be a virginal innocent with a budding sexuality, the camera seems unable to find a way of showing it. The actress is certainly able to convey her character's naiveté; where she falls down is in the emergence of sexual arousal, and in the expression of injured fear later on. For this sort of story you need a good victim, and Alicia Príncipe has all the trembling masochistic allure of a cabbage. For a film that deals with amorality and sadism, there's a stultifying lack of sharpness here; repetition seems to have dulled the blade of Franco's passion, so the film never really achieves the intensity it requires.

The one scene that *does* work – a dinner party on a garden patio – involves some genuine characterisation. The ever-reliable Carmen Carrión (*La casa de las mujeres perdidas*; *Mil sexos tiene la noche*) plays the odious Princess Bombaqui, who claims that she could never make love to a black woman because she believes in the superiority of the white race, while Mario, despite his 'nice guy' qualms about Odile, makes dismal racist comments about the filthiness of so-called 'Moors'. Discussing the matter further, the Princess blithers, "*Eroticism has no limits. Sometimes a stupid and dirty person can be very attractive.*" Her aristocratic consort (Daniel Katz) is unflatteringly spotlighted too, when in a plot detail revived from *Sadomania* (1981) it transpires that he's unable to consummate sexually, the implication being that his sadism is not some grand philosophical position, merely a reaction to impotence. And then there's Mara (Mari Carmen Nieto), who sneers behind the Count's back when he fails to get it up, which adds a horrid little detail to her blandly unfeeling character. As always in his Sadean films, Franco is at pains to demonstrate that although the libertine may wish to form convivial cliques and alliances, the true Sadean is totally alone: he or she may seek the company of equals, but 'fellow libertines' will sell you down the river for their momentary advantage or trifling amusement. Entry into the Sadean palace of pleasure entails being forever locked out of the social contract; there can be no appeal for

decency, fairness or loyalty, because all these values are supplanted by self-interest.

The Sexual Story of O has its admirers, indeed there are a few who feel it's one of the highlights of the period. For me, though, it's a snack in place of a feast; even the prolonged hallucinatory whipping sequence at the climax seems somehow gaudy and flimsy rather than weird and disturbing (Franco and Soler use some sort of refracting device that separates the colours into primary components, but it's a rather cheap-looking effect – paste, not jewellery). Made the same month as the genuinely strange and marvellous *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, it's an odd little misfire that shows there's a limit to how many times you can tell what is essentially the same story. Like *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, and to a lesser extent *Mil sexos...*, there's something solipsistic about it, about its repetitions, its echoey claustrophobia, and the shrinking means with which it attempts to capture our attention. When these films work, one is mesmerised by the play of pure cinema, happy to float in a state of suspended delirium as Franco lets loose the hypnotic demon that lives in his psyche, creating erotic meditations with his incantatory camerawork and plangent avant-garde music. When they don't work, one is left feeling that the 'dirty laundry' of Franco's fantasies is getting one public wash too many; patterns are fading, the fabric is falling apart...

Music: The opening credits use the same beguiling Daniel White composition for female vocal and guitar featured on the credit sequence of *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*. This seems remiss; surely Franco would have thought twice before making two consecutive films with the same title music? However, all the indications are that the films were made back-to-back. The theme from *La comtesse noire* returns yet again, while the title music to *Mil sexos tiene la noche* signals the switcheroo from phony friendliness to sadistic manipulation when Odile collapses drugged at a poolside luncheon. "Sexy Rock" gets its second consecutive outing (playing on the radio in Odile's hotel room).

Locations: The Costa del Sol, probably near Málaga. The same distinctive style of lamp is visible in both the Princess's hallway in this film and the psychiatrist's surgery in *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, suggesting that both were shot in the same hotel.

Connections: Firstly, let's just forget about tying this in any way, shape or form to "*The Story of 'O'*" ... Mario's vacillating conscience about selling Odile to her tormentors ("*I can't send that girl to be killed*") is met by a hilarious lack of feeling in Mara ("*Why do you see it that way?*") and an even funnier *volte-face* from him ("*We've done it before, what the hell... And that pervert couple pays well.*"). In this respect Mario echoes the character of Tom in *La comtesse perverse*, who also suffered from an inconvenient arrhythmia of conscience. Mario begins his first (less than explosive) sexual encounter with Odile as a predatory white slaver, bedding a new victim while planning to sell her to a pair of sadistic sex-killers. By the time he's ejaculated, he's turned into a soppy, lovesick puppy with delusions of decency. "*Even the toughest man feels guilty sometimes,*" he says to Mara. It's quite a big 'ask' to find his moral

journey believable, but at least we see him discussing his doubts and misgivings, whereas Tom's feelings in *La comtesse perverse* remained frustratingly opaque. Both films climax with the melancholy image of a man carrying the body of a young woman into the sea; but whereas the ending had some power in *La comtesse perverse* because the film itself bristled with malignant energy, here the sadness feels unearned. You'll probably just find yourself thinking what a hypocrite Mario is, and how conveniently the film has kept him ambling around the island until it's too late for him to save anyone ... As mentioned, our pretty, indolent young heroine is reading Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Except for the obvious irony in the title, nothing in the passages we hear being read out connects with the subject-matter of the film; it's just another example of Franco's occasional tendency to namedrop literary and artistic figures in a superficial manner (see Dali in *Eugénie, historia de una perversion*).

Other versions: A longer version of the film, with an extended climax, is reputed to have been released on Spanish DVD as a 'kiosk' (news-stand) release à la Franco's hardcore titles *El ojete de Lulú*, *Entre pitos anda el juego* and *El mirón y la exhibicionista*.

BARRIO CHINO

translation: *China Town*

UNRELEASED

Alternative title

Barrio Porno [unreleased hardcore version]

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date

1983

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel White**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** (Al Pereira). **Lina Romay**. **Rosa María Minuner**. **Trino Trives**. **Carmen Carrión**. **José Llamas**. **Flavia Mayans**.

Production notes: According to Franco, this "very violent" adventure film featuring Franco's favourite private eye Al Pereira was completed but never found distribution. The title refers to a region of Barcelona, between the Avinguda del Paral·lel and the lower Rambla, commonly associated with crime, drugs and prostitution. Although it translates literally as 'China Town' or the 'Chinese Quarter', the name is actually a generic reference to all



THIS PAGE:
Carmen Carrión wields the whip, in the 'lost' Jess Franco film Barrio Chino (1983).

NEXT PAGE, from Barrio Chino:
Carmen Carrión faces off against a knife-wielding Trino Trives while little Flavia Mayans looks on. Carrión appears to be in cahoots with José Llamas, who is restraining an unknown female.



foreigners, as the area was inhabited by immigrants from other parts of Spain or abroad. (It's also a repetition of the Spanish title for Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*.) The area's loucheness provided literary inspiration for Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal*. Franco's *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963) was originally to have been set in the Barrio Chino but to avoid censorship was moved to an unnamed Central American location. Stills discovered by Christophe Bier point to a pronounced S&M element, with an actress dressed in rubber fetish dominatrix gear wielding a riding crop. The same fetish gear can be seen in *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, so given that fetish-rubber and leather were not of personal interest to Franco or Romy, it seems likely that *Barrio Chino* was filmed soon after the shooting block in which *Lilian* was lensed. A hardcore version called *Barrio porno* was also created, with scenes thought to have been added from another source, but it remains as elusive as the original. Picture-only negs for both versions exist in the collection of the Filmoteca Española, where they were deposited by Fotofilm Madrid in 1999.

EN BUSCA DEL DRAGÓN DORADO

(SP theatrical title)

translation: *In Search of the Golden Dragon*

Spain 1983

depósito legal no: M-31.580-1983

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Columbia Films S.A. (source: SMC)

Cinema 2000 S.A. (source: IMDb)

Timeline

Shooting date	Summer	1983
Depósito legal number	07 October	1983
Date of approval	26 December	1983
Seville (for one day)	24 August	1985
Barcelona (for one day)	15 November	1987

Intended theatrical running time

Spain	83m
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Video running time (converted)

SP 'Aper Video' PAL VHS	82m23s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'James P. Johnson']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Enrique**

Díaz. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. music recording (in Dolby): **Eurosonic**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**.. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**.. Fujicolor. Techniscope. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **César Antonio Serrano** [as 'Li Yung'] (Samura, a supernatural warrior). **Flavia Mayans** [as 'Flavia Hervás'] (Flavia). **Ivana Mayans** [as 'Vanesa'] (Vanesa, 'Almond eyes'). **Luis Rodríguez** (Riao). **Trino Trives** (Salomon Hainowitz, a treasure hunter). **Jess Franco** (Chen, a mystic). **Emilio Linder** (Flavia's father). **Juana de la Morena** (Flavia's mother). **Rosa María Minuner** [as 'Josette Graff'] (Hainowitz's sidekick). **Rafael Cayetano** (one of Hainowitz's thugs).

Synopsis: *On holiday in the Far East, a little girl called Flavia wanders away from her bickering parents and sees a fight between two Chinese men and a woman. The men are searching for a treasure map on behalf of a treasure hunter called Hainowitz. Hearing another child crying nearby, Flavia meets Vanesa, who knows where the map is hidden. The children steal the map. After an enigmatic encounter with a Chinese mystic called Chen, who summons Samura, a martial arts spirit, to watch over them, they embark on a search for the treasure. Along the way, Flavia and Vanesa meet a native boy called Riao who joins them in their quest. However, Hainowitz and his wife are hot on the trail too, and when the adults manage to steal the treasure map it seems the children are in peril. Arriving at a mystical cave where the gold is hidden, the children are joined by the mystical Samura and the adults are defeated. Flavia returns to the hotel; her parents are relieved to find her safe and sound.*

Review: Franco's penultimate project for Golden Films, *En busca del dragón dorado*, is one of the weirdest things he ever inflicted on a paying audience. Yes, you could watch this in a cinema back in the day, but you had to be quick: as far as I can tell it played for one day in Seville and one day in Barcelona. Based yet again around Poe's "The Gold-Bug", it's a karate-themed action adventure for children, starring Antonio Mayans's young daughters, Flavia and Ivana, wandering around the Murcian scrubland (sorry, Africa) while a pair of dastardly adults try to steal their treasure map. It's certainly unusual, and admirable too after the retreads of recent months, but it's also unwatchable for anyone but the very young and the very obsessed. If you're so deep into your Jess Franco safari that you no longer need sex, violence or the vestiges of storytelling, *En busca del dragón dorado* possesses much to tickle the senses. I can't in all honesty recommend it to anyone else; a casual viewer with no prior experience of Franco would quite rightly treat it like one of those too-specialised 'delicacies' served up to unwitting tourists by bored ethnic minorities: spicy elephant's testicles, bar's vomit porridge, or purée of dung-beetle. But enough of the health warnings, what's on the menu?



LI YUNG
FLAVIA HERVAS
VANESA
TRINO TRIVES

EN BUSCA DEL DRAGON DORADO

JOSETTE GRAFF
Produced by JOSETTE GRAFF
Director: James P. Johnson
Produced by JOSETTE GRAFF
EASTMANCOLOR



TOP: Riio (Luis Rodriguez) hangs out with a rather sleepy tiger at a Safari Park in Elche, near Alicante.
 BOTTOM L: Riio sorts out a pesky adult. Bottom R: Flavia (Flavia Mayans) and Vanesa (Ivana Mayans) with a friendly chimp. Marauding tortoise just out of shot...

1. Inspired by Bruce Lee's patent battle cries, Franco delivers a mystical hero, Samura (César Antonio Serrano), who squawks like a deranged budgerigar, pushing absurdity to the maximum in a performance that makes 'Melissa the Bird Woman' from *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* sound like the lady who reads the Radio Four shipping forecasts.
2. Much of the running time is taken up with three primary-school children happily strolling around the countryside, while various animals and birds (voiced, one suspects by a tipsy Franco) chitter-chatter and look on. The kids are decent actors, actually, and I'm sure they would have easily coped with the demands of a regular children's drama. But this film, of course, is nothing of the kind...
3. The highlight is a scene in which a giant tortoise steals a treasure map. It lasts for five minutes which feel like twenty. We follow the intrepid reptile through the scrublands of southern Spain as it wanders slowly away from the sleeping children and delivers the map straight into the laps of the wicked, money-grabbing adults, who are bivouacked over the nearest hillock! If you've ever had problems with the pacing in a Jess Franco film, this tardy tortoise seems to mock your frustration in one knowingly ironic image. If only for this, *En busca del dragón dorado* deserves your admiration.
4. Watch in amazement as Franco takes padding to a whole new level! A stroll through a national park gobbles up another five minutes, as the kids go riding on elephants.
5. Despite all the wildlife running around the place, the children are never exposed to danger. Well, except for the scene where a boy of ten (Luis Rodriguez) strokes an uncaged tiger. Although his IMDb entry has no other film credits, Antonio Mayans assures me that the little daredevil did not get eaten...
6. The same actor, playing protector to Antonio Mayans' daughters, beats up a gang of adults with some reasonably convincing karate, one of the few examples of unambiguous male heroism in Jess Franco's cinema.

It's hard enough to believe such a film exists when you're watching it in the privacy of your own home, but can you imagine seeing it in a cinema? No one could ever accuse Franco of being a slave to convention, and even here, making kiddie's films on tuppence, he remains stubbornly idiosyncratic. The worst of his movies are those that feel as though they could have been made by anyone, and believe me, that's *not* the case here. I had to almost pinch myself at times, suspecting that maybe I was dreaming the damned thing. Stick with *En busca del dragón dorado* all the way through; you won't quite believe what you've seen.

Franco on screen: Franco seems to be channelling Yoda in his utterly ridiculous role as a Chinese mystic hanging around a seafront bar at the start of the film. (In later life Franco would claim to have inspired the design of Yoda.) And could it be Franco himself dubbing the martial arts hero's squawks?

Music: The score for electric piano and string synthesiser develops

a few faintly unsettling themes. Elsewhere, jolly music twitters inanely over adjoining scenes, like something added by your laptop's photo-viewing software.

Locations: Shot in the coastal resort of Tarragona, and the Safari Park at Elche. The seafront location is Benidorm.

Connections: This really must be the most preposterous 'adaptation' ever filmed. Quite what it has to do with Poe's "The Gold Bug", except for the treasure-hunt aspect, I've no idea. The original tale made great use of cryptograms (in fact it was the first story to do so and played a major role in popularising the concept of code-breaking and cryptography). If Franco has cunningly concealed cryptographic elements in the film, then it'll take a more perceptive soul than I to decipher them ... Rosa María Minuner [as 'Josette Graff'] appeared for Franco again in the *very* different *Un pito para tres* ... The unknown actor playing Hainowitz's servant, Kumo, would turn up again as Colonel Blimp's cabbie in *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido* ... The opening shots are identical to those at the beginning of *The Sexual Story of O*, namely red roses blooming in a beautiful Spanish garden ... The title was perhaps inspired by the Spanish release of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which was renamed *En busca del arca perdida*.

Other versions: Surely a remake is on the cards? Come on, Mr. Tarantino, *En busca del dragón dorado* is ripe for reinvention!

GOLDEN TEMPLE AMAZONS

(export title)

Spain 1983 [& France 1985?]

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Tundra y el templo del sol (SP)

Les Amazones du Temple d'or (FR)

Alternative titles

Der Goldene Tempel der Amazonen (WG video)

Unconfirmed titles

O Mistério do Templo de Ouro (POR theatrical?)

The Golden Temple of Mystery

Production companies

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Eurociné (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date (Spain)

circa Summer

1983

Shooting date (Paris)	1985?
French visa number issued	16 December 1986
Paris	17 January 1990

<i>Theatrical running time</i>	
France	84m

<i>DVD running time</i>	
US 'Shriek Show' NTSC DVD	84m50s

Tundra y el templo del sol credits: writer/director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**.

Les Amazones du Temple d'or credits: director: **Jess Franco** [as 'James Gartner'] & [uncredited] **Alain Payet**. producer: **Jess Franco** [as 'Jess Frank']. executive producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. screenplay by **Jess Franco** [uncredited] and **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.L. Mariaux']. adaptation and post-production supervisor: **George Freedland**. music: **Norbert Verrone**, published by Dava Music. photography: **Henry Frogers**. production manager: **Marius Lesoeur**. script supervisor: **Ilona Kunesova**. assistant director: **Dan Jouanisson**. sound mixer: **Michel Commo**. sound studio: **Antegor**. laboratory: **Éclair**. special effects: **SOIS Company**.

Cast: **Analía Ivars** (Liana Simpson). **Stanley Kapoul** (Kuku). **Eva León** (Rena, Amazon Governess). **Antonio Mayans** (Bob). **William Berger** (Uruk, the Chief). **Emilio Linder** (Harvey Mason, an archaeologist). **Alicia Príncipe** (Bella Mason, Harvey's wife). **Claude Marchal**. **Olivier Mathot** (Father Johnston). **Jean René Gossart** (Mr. Simpson). **Françoise Blanchard** (Amazon rider). **Lina Romay** (Amazon guarding Uruk's bedchamber).

Synopsis: *Present-day Africa. A tribe of blonde warrior-women ride topless on horseback to slay Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, two missionaries who have profaned the Amazons' temple and stolen their gold. Five-year-old daughter Liana escapes and is taken in by a local tribe. Years later, Liana is respected by the natives and is friends with all the animals. A Catholic priest, Father Johnston, shows up and reads to Liana from her father's journal, revealing how he met his death. Liana vows to avenge her parents and sets off to find the Amazons' temple, assisted by Kuku, a buffoonish witch doctor. On the way, they team up with Harvey Mason, an archaeologist, and his wife Bella. Bella is overcome by a naturally occurring soporific gas at the entrance to the temple and is captured by the Amazons. When the others turn up they are thrown into the dungeons by Rena, cruel captain of the Amazonian guards. Their high priest, Uruk, decides that Liana has the necessary attributes to become an Amazon warrior. He saves her from Rena, but the others are not so blessed. Rena sentences Harvey and his wife to be trussed up together, back-to-back inside a circle of spikes, where they will be whipped until one or the other falls. Can Liana and her friendly chimpanzee Rocky save the day?*

Production notes: Seen by 2400 people during its two-week run in Paris in 1990, *Golden Temple Amazons* was the last Jess Franco film to play a first run cinema engagement in Europe. However, by the time it did so the film was already seven years old. It had started out as a Spanish project made in 1983 for Golden Films, entitled *Tundra y el templo del sol*, which languished unfinished for a couple of years until Eurociné expressed an interest. Golden Films sent Eurociné the existing footage, at which point things turned sour: the film became entangled in a dispute between Golden Films and Eurociné concerning another unfinished Franco project (see *SIDA La peste del siglo XX*, 1985). Eurociné hung onto the *Tundra* footage, despatched French porno director Alain Payet to shoot new material, and released the resulting mongrel as *Les Amazones du Temple d'or*. This is the version we can see today on DVD.

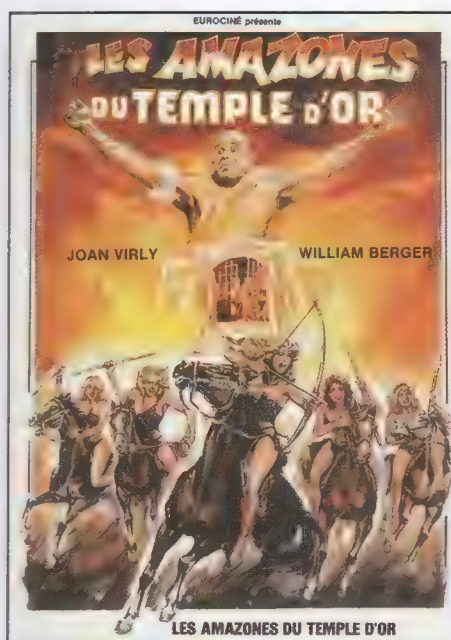
Review: "Nobody can call Kuku a clown and live!" says Kuku, a comedy-relief jungle charlatan in *Golden Temple Amazons*, a quasi-racist and terminally stupid attempt to do what Spielberg and Lucas were getting away with in the Indiana Jones films, except with a budget of five hundred francs. Since the film is not entirely the work of Jess Franco, one is irresistibly tempted to put it aside and avoid wasting time taking pot-shots at its obvious flaws. It was finished by porno journeyman Alain Payet, Franco's one-time stablemate at Comptoir Français du Film Production, but honestly no one comes out of this with their head held high. It's just a dreadfully under-financed slog through the bushes that offers only cheap laughs at the expense of an overstretched production. Analía Ivars, supposedly a warrior girl with the spirit of the ancients coursing through her veins, looks rather more like one of The Bangles, fresh from a hairdressing appointment, and she's as stonily blank as only a horribly embarrassed actress can be. Essentially, the appeal of the film can be summed up in the phrase 'jiggling breasts'. Once you've seen the film's topless 'Amazons' on horseback, their tits doing the rumba to the most hideous piece of 1980s library music ever recorded, you've had all the fun there is to be had from this dungball of a film. If you've watched a lot of Franco films and feel like time off for good behaviour, consider yourself excused from this dismal experience.

Cast and crew: Lina Romay can be spotted fleetingly as one of the guards outside Uruk's bedchamber.

Music: Atrocious synthetic drums wedded to synthesised slap-bass, strewn repetitively across the images with absolutely no concern for mood. Hands down, the worst score ever on a Franco film until the video productions of the late 1990s.

Locations: Somewhere on the outskirts of Paris for the Alain Payet material featuring Olivier Mathot and Jean René Gossart; Elche in Spain for the rest.

Connections: The presence of Mathot, Blanchard and Ivars in the material shot by Alain Payet suggests that these scenes may have been collected around the same time additional footage was being shot for Eurociné's *Revenge in the House of Usher* ... Since Franco was a big fan of the director Curt Siodmak, the character name



TOP: A scene shot by Franco for Tundra y el templo del sol: Kuku (Stanley Kapoul) menaces Liana (Analía Ivars).

BOTTOM: This scene was shot by Alain Payet some time later, when Eurociné bought the unfinished Tundra and turned it into Golden Temple Amazons.



from Golden Temple Amazons:
Liana (Analiá Ivars) bound and imprisoned by Uruk's tribe.

'Kuku' probably stems from his recollection of Siodmak's *Curucu, Beast of the Amazon* (1956) about a trip into the jungle to fetch a ridiculous parrot monster.

Other versions: Franco's unfinished original version remains unseen, but it's what you might call a low priority search item ... According to unattributed text at a Portuguese streaming movie site [http://pt.fulltv.tv/], *Golden Temple Amazons* premiered theatrically in Portugal in 1986. The site also claims that a version exists dubbed into Portuguese. More recently, a rare theatrical screening of this film was scheduled at the Cinemateca Portuguesa in Lisbon on 20 May 2013, where it was billed as *Les Amazones du Temple d'or* with Portuguese subtitles. However, the screening did not take place, apparently due to a power failure.

EL ABUELO, LA CONDESA Y ESCARLATA LA TRAVIESA

(SP) *The Grandfather, the Countess, and Scarlet the Cross*
UNRELEASED

Spain 1983?

depósito legal no: M-11.808-1985

Alternative title

Scarlet (planned export title)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date	1983
Depósito legal number	27 March 1985

Intended theatrical running time

Spain	100m
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. adapted from Octave Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*. music: **Daniel White**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. sound re-recording studio and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor, Techniscope.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Escarlata). **Eva León**. **Antonio Mayans**. **Augustin Gil**. **Analía Ivars**. **Juan Soler Cózar**. **José Llamas**. **Roberto Bartual**.

Synopsis: *The Mexican Revolution. Escarlata is on the run with her lover, a rebel fighter. They are split up, and Escarlata finds her way to a rich man's estate where she seduces the butler and gardener. Escarlata persuades them to get her a job at the mansion. The mistress of the house, her husband, her grandfather and her daughter are each seduced by the charms of the mischievous Escarlata. One night, Escarlata's revolutionary boyfriend returns to claim his girl, and while he's in the house he steals the rich family's valuables. After more sexy adventures, Escarlata regains her post and all is resolved.*

Production notes: This remake of Franco's 1974 sex comedy *Celestine, An All Round Maid* was completed to release standard in 1983, but remained in the hands of Golden Films International who for reasons unknown made no attempt to release it. According to Alain Petit, the film did appear briefly in a Spanish distribution catalogue in 1992, but there's no evidence that it was ever bought or screened. A picture of the title card (displaying the film's Depósito Legal number) has made its way onto the internet.

CAMINO SOLITARIO

(SP theatrical title)

translation: *The Lonely Path*

Spain 1983

Production company

Manacoa Films

Theatrical distributor

Cinema International Corporation (CIC)

Timeline

Shooting date	Summer	1983
Date of approval	20 June	1983
Seville	04 November	1983
Barcelona	23 January	1984
Murcia	08 July	1985
Madrid	07 April	1986

Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
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Video/TV running times (converted)

SP 'Malibu Video' PAL VHS	101m05s
SP TV PAL transmission	97m32s

writer/director/producer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz** [as 'Enrique Diez']. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans'].

make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa M. Almirall']. editor: **Laura Arias**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] & **Jess Franco**. music recording: **Estudios Eurosonic**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: producer: **Jess Franco**. 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Alfredo Pereira). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candice Coster'] (Eva Raden/Adriana Esteba). **Ricardo Palacios** (Mario Guimera de Raden). **Carmen Carrión** (Carmen). **José Llamas** (José Punset [SP pressbook: Alberto]). **Flavia Mayans** (Flavia Pereira). **Jess Franco** (Doctor Mario Kalman). **Juana de la Morena** (Mrs. Pereira).

Synopsis: *Alfredo Pereira is a small-time private detective on the Costa del Sol who lives separately from his wife and has custody of their seven-year-old daughter Flavia. One day he's hired by Eva Raden, a wealthy and attractive woman, to retrieve her younger sister Adriana, who's recently disappeared after a family argument. Eva is married to wealthy businessman Mario Raden, who is seriously ill. During his investigations, Al meets a bartender and piano singer named Carmen and a young man named José, who was once Eva's lover; they tell him not to investigate further. Al tracks Adriana to a shop in the town, but she flees and loses him in the crowd. Thanks to Eva's help he eventually finds Adriana and brings her back home. Attracted by Eva, Alfredo starts investigating her past. He learns from Carmen that Eva got married for money and that José is still in love with her – what he doesn't know is that Eva was Carmen's lover too. Kalman, Raden's doctor, asks Al to keep an eye on his protégé, José, who may be in trouble. Pereira later meets Eva at Carmen's café, but Eva seems to recognise neither Carmen nor José. Al and Eva become lovers and Eva reveals that she accidentally killed Adriana during an argument. Al agrees to dispose of the body. When Al visits Eva again, Mario Raden surprises them in bed together, but he dies of a stroke before he has time to pull the trigger of his revolver. The detective finally discovers the truth: he is actually the victim of a diabolical plot hatched by Adriana, who killed her own sister and Carmen, and pretended to be Eva in order to get Raden's inheritance. Pereira finds Adriana in bed with José, and tells him the truth: blinded by rage, the young man strangles Adriana under Al's impassive gaze. Disgusted, the private eye returns home to his little Flavia.*

Production notes: When a modest win on the lottery gave Franco a financial boost, he instantly set about making a new film with the money. Dusting off a script he had first written in 1972, for an aborted project that would have starred Marisa Mell, Barbara Bouchet and Mark Damon, he embarked on a minimalist private eye story with echoes of film noir and Hitchcock...

Review: Well, this one is unusual. Of interest solely to hardcore Franco fans, *Camino solitario* lacks the excitement one might reasonably expect from such nominally exploitable subjects as

crime, sex and film noir intrigue. In fact you can scratch sex off the list, because the prominent presence of Mayans' young daughter Flavia appears once again to have ruled out Franco's customary explicitness in that department. We do get a lesbian scene (how could we not?) but the action takes place below the edge of the frame, while the remaining love clinches involving Antonio Mayans, Lina Romay and José Llamas are chaste by Franco standards. Instead of sleaze and torment, a peaceful domesticity rules the roost, with Franco's perennial private eye Al Pereira depicted as a quiet, diligent single parent, taking his daughter to school, chatting with her at home, and dropping her off with his ex-wife. In between these responsibilities he investigates a missing persons case that eventually leads to a mild sort of heartbreak, although it's nothing a loving chat with his charming little daughter can't salve.

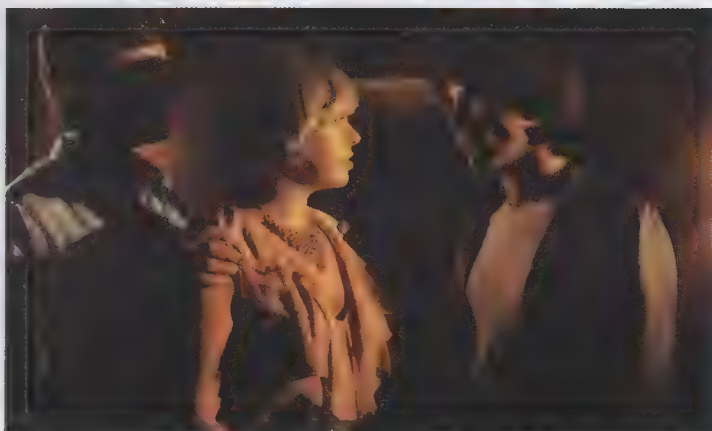
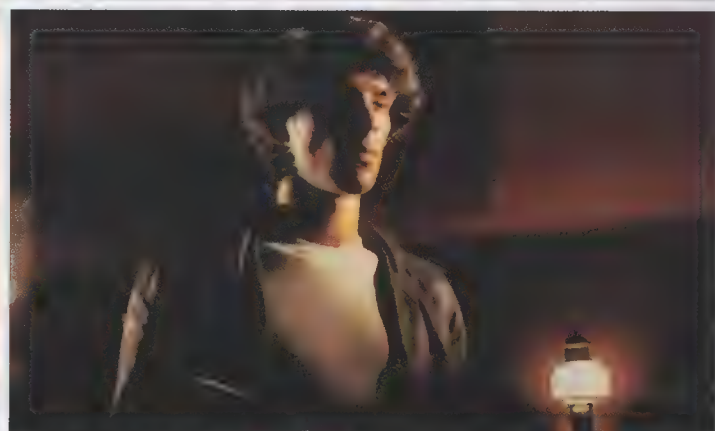
This is something new for Franco; a film in which the atmosphere is one of ease and relaxation. For the first time in his career the home is portrayed as a genuine sanctuary, and the relationships within it benevolent and decent. For fans of the darkest Franco this is all very disorientating: a window into another world where fathers are *not* abusive, where daughters are neither victims nor libertines, where the home is not a stifling hotbed of perversion. From the point of view of Franco's regular oeuvre, *Camino solitario* is a bit like peering down a powerful telescope into another galaxy, observing alien beings with completely different lifestyles.

Camino solitario ploughs a very similar furrow to *Los blues de la calle Pop*, but the keynote this time is sincerity, not irony. The hero is reasonably heroic, albeit a little slow on the uptake, and the suffering caused by the villainous Adriana is treated as reprehensible instead of being greeted with the kind of amoral shrug that so often pervades Franco's attitude to criminality. In fact these aspects, plus the concentration on a loving family man and his well-adjusted daughter, feel about as close to an engagement with the real world around him that Franco had so far attempted. One wonders whether he felt inclined to give this film to the actors as a quiet recognition of their decency and friendship, a chance to play characters who were not necessarily perverts, fools or monsters! This is particularly so in relation to the Mayans family. Juana de la Morena (Mayans' real-life spouse) and Flavia Mayans (his eldest daughter), are naturalistic and very plausible, and more than anything the film feels like a present from Franco to the Mayans family; a sort of moving photo-album.

Everything about *Camino solitario* is designed to spread the lowest of budgets as efficiently as possible. The amount of driving around in cars is pushed to the max, offering the impression of movement and lots of cheap tracking shots, even though the story itself moves like treacle dripping off a spoon. The closest thing to action is seeing Mayans dashing around the back streets and shopping arcades of Torremolinos, showing a photo of a missing woman to various store-holders and passers-by. At the Intermezzo Bar he meets pianist Carmen Carrión and club manager José Llamas, who by now have notched up so many credits for Franco that it's almost as if we're dropping in to see a couple of old friends.



from Camino solitario:
Play it again... Al Pereira (Antonio Mayans) tries to get to the bottom of yet another femme fatale mystery,
with the help of pianist Carmen (Carmen Carrión).



MAIN PICTURE: Al Pereira is hired by Eva Raden (Lina Romay) to find what has happened to her sister Adriana also present is Eva's sick husband Mario (Ricardo Palacios), whose considerable wealth accounts for his pretty young wife
MIDDLE L: Al Pereira (Antonio Mayans) tussles with Eva (Lina Romay) - or is it her identical sister Adriana? MIDDLE R: Eva's lover José (José Llamas)
BOTTOM L: Al Pereira, Eva and José, caught in a web of lies. BOTTOM R: Al Pereira takes the counsel of his daughter Claudia (Flavia Mayans)

Pereira gets the usual kicking, this time from a couple of nightclub bouncers, but even this is handled casually. The hugely overweight Ricardo Palacios, gamely willing to strip nude in the name of art, is the most extraordinary figure onscreen. Playing a wealthy father who employs Pereira to find his missing daughter, he resembles Orson Welles in his later years, and in the humid climate of the Mediterranean one worries for him even climbing the stairs. However, despite strong work from Mayans and Palacios the acting honours must go to Lina Romay, who excels in her dual role. She's especially riveting during the film's climactic revelations, oozing spite and malevolence and raising the temperature and menace of a film that has otherwise felt pretty warm and gentle.

As the final revelations play out, one can't help wishing that the story could have been filmed in a style more suited to a murder-mystery in the Italian giallo mould. The script is based on an idea Franco first had in the early seventies, and it was almost made back then with the stunning Marisa Mell as the female lead (in which case, narrative similarities to Lucio Fulci's 1968 giallo *One on Top of the Other* would have been even more noticeable). Instead *Camino solitario* reaches the screen in 1983, a year when Franco, working with incredibly low budgets, would amass his highest annual total of movies. But while it's true that the film might have benefitted from a more energised approach, if you're exhausted by the pervasive darkness of Jess Franco's movies and you fancy the equivalent of a day off with your feet up, you could do worse than take a stroll through this beguiling celluloid vacation.

Spanish theatrical release: Hard though it is to imagine for a film is as obscure and low budget as this, *Camino solitario* played in Madrid at the Cinestudio Regio, a 3-screen theatre tending towards mainstream first releases. Also showing that week: *Tootsie* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Sadly it stayed only three days before closing. There were no further Madrid screenings. In Seville it managed to secure just a single day's booking, at a multi-screen theatre called the Avenida Multicentro. It fared slightly better in Barcelona, playing for a week on the bottom end of an unlikely double bill with *Flashdance*, and scoring another week of bookings on re-release in August 1988.

Cast and crew: Playing Pereira's daughter is Flavia Hervás, aka Flavia Mayans Hervás, Antonio Mayans's daughter. Owing to her tender years she was dubbed by her older sister Regina ... Ricardo Palacios (*Attack of the Robots*; *The Blood of Fu Manchu*) appeared in seven Franco films during the 1980s: *Los blues de la calle Pop*, *Camino solitario*, *Sola ante el terror*, *Juego sucio en Casablanca*, *Furia en el trópico*, and two unreleased titles, *Voces de muerte* and *SIDA La peste del siglo XX*.

Franco on screen: Franco plays a fairly restrained gay character here, in contrast to the comic turns elsewhere in his repertoire.

Music: The title music, "Piano sidéral", is a sentimental piece for piano which composer Daniel White has soaked in echo effects, creating a 'haunted ballroom' feel. It was first used in *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* back in 1973, and can be found on White's library LP *Mood Music Selection No. 1: Cocktail*.

Locations: We're in Torremolinos, off-season. The crowds are thinly scattered and half the shops are closed. Franco gives us plenty of views of the Plaza Andalucía, the main shopping precinct, and Pereira asks questions at one of the town's oldest restaurants, El Gato Viudo, which is still trading today. Kallman and Pereira have lunch at a street café in La Carihuela, a part of Torremolinos known for its fish restaurants.

Connections: Raymond Chandler is referenced in the dialogue, and the storyline has a Hitchcockian quality, but by now such allusions and echoes of popular cinema are becoming obsolete; Franco is suspended in his own lonely firmament, with the glamour and finance of Hollywood cinema just a string of twinkling lights at great distance on a faraway shore...

LAS CHICAS DEL TANGA

(SP theatrical title)

Translation: *Thong Girls*

Spain 1983

depósito legal no: M-41.397-1983

Production company

Manacoa Films

Theatrical distributors

Zafiro Films S.A.

Cinema International Corporation

Timeline

Shooting date	Autumn	1983
Depósito legal number	16 December	1983
Seville	17 May	1985
Murcia*	08 November	1985
Madrid	09 April	1987

*At the Semana Internacional de Cine Naval y del Mar, 1985.

Theatrical running time

Spain	84m
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Video/TV running times (converted)

SP 'Azor Films' PAL VHS	84m37s
SP TV PAL transmission	82m04s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Rosa Almirall']. writer: **Jess Franco** [as Jesús Franco]. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Francisco Beringola**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J. A. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**.

wardrobe: **Péris, hnos.** music: **Fernando García Morcillo**. camera equipment: **Aguayo**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.** sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.** Fujicolor. *Uncredited*: producer: **Jess Franco**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Lola Clavijo). **Eva León** (Lola's secretary). **Antonio Mayans** ("Artesani"). **Muriel Montossé** [as 'Silvia Montez'] (Muriel, a French tourist). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cózar'] (Philip, a Dutch tourist). **Analía Ivars** (Patinadora, girl on roller-skates). **José Llamas** (self-styled "Marqués de Pinohermoso", a playboy). **Rafael Cayetano** [as 'Ramón R Garcí'] (Paco [SP pressbook: Ramón]). **Gina** (Charro, Ramon's transsexual girlfriend [SP pressbook: Gina]). **Juana de la Morena** [as 'Juana Plaza'] (Juana de Antequera). **Agustín Gil** aka **Agustín García** (Juan de Antequera, a transvestite). **Flavia Hervás** (Gina de Antequera, Juan's youngest daughter). **Vanessa de la Morena** (Juan's older daughter).

Synopsis: *Felix, a photographer, narrates a story of Benidorm; the fates and foibles of the tourists and the local con-artists who seek to make money from them. Along the way, we meet hustlers, actresses, prostitutes and transvestites – and as they meet, love blossoms in unexpected places...*

Production notes: *Las chicas del tanga* is one of two non-pornographic Jess Franco films for which he used a pseudonym giving credit to Lina Romay. He'd already signed 1982's *Confesiones de una exhibicionista* as 'Candy Coster' (Romay's 'blonde' acting pseudonym), and he signed *Las chicas del tanga* as 'Rosa Almirall', which was Romay's birth name. So did Romay really direct these films? When I asked co-star and production manager Antonio Mayans about this recently, he was unequivocal: "*She did not direct. Even on shoots I didn't work on, I don't believe she ever directed. She didn't have the temperament. I think Jess said she directed so that she would get some kind of payment after his death, as he fully expected to die before she did.*"¹ Franco also gave credit to Romay for his hardcore porn films of the 1980s, beginning with *Una rajita para dos* (signed with Romay's hardcore acting pseudonym 'Lulu La Verne') and ending with *Las chuponas* (as 'Candy Coster'), but in these cases the reason was, essentially, that he didn't want to add these crude and trivial hardcore titles to his filmography. While not quite ashamed of them, certainly not for moral reasons, he was aware that they did nothing to aid his reputation as a filmmaker...

Review: Shot in and around the street cafés, shopping arcades and tourist beaches of the Costa del Sol, this is a delightfully meandering affair with just a few punctuations of high drama. As in *Camino solitario*, Franco's usual diet of sex, horror and crime has been toned down; what seems to matter more is the environment, specifically Benidorm, a town very popular with British tourists in the 1970s and 1980s. Unlikely though it may seem, the film is

a kind of tribute to Benidorm, an affectionate portrait complete with elegiac voice-over. A plastic palm-tree Interzone of gift-shops, British theme pubs and tourist traps, catering for a downmarket demographic, it's a place that may strike some viewers as unworthy of attention. Yet in *Las chicas del tanga*, fakery and tawdriness are essential to the overall theme: all of the main characters are playing a charade of some sort. In Benidorm, national character dissolves into little more than a simulation of Spanishness, and the story reflects the town's fragile identity with its rudderless, anecdotal, episodic plot concerning hustlers posing as jet-set playboys, cheap actresses on the make, and gimcrack drag artists performing in seafront tavernas for the amusement of docile tourists.

Antonio Mayans stands out as "Artesani", a would-be-sophisticated Spanish gigolo trying to fleece foreign women. He's sneaky, dishonest, but ultimately likeable, and he's played with a light touch by Mayans, who relishes the chance to send up a classic Spanish archetype without overdoing the comedy, keeping his take on the character firmly within context. José Llamas plays Mayans's rival for the attentions (and money) of Muriel, a French tourist who's not quite as green, nor as carefree, as she first appears; Lina Romay and Eva León play an actress and her secretary vacationing in the town, and Juan Soler is a shy photographer obsessed with the ugliness of Benidorm's architecture who finds himself the unlikely quarry of a bubbly young roller-skater, one of the 'thong girls' of the title. It's typical of Franco's dry humour that even the two little girls we see (played by Antonio Mayans's daughters) are hustling the tourists like seasoned professionals, raising money to feed their addiction to arcade video games. We see them hassling Muriel for money until Mayans comes along and scares them away, which pays off in the next scene with an amusing in-joke for Franco watchers, when the girls' mother (played by their real mother Juana de la Morena) angrily yells at Mayans (her real life husband) for picking on her daughters.

Amid the cheeky, light-hearted comedy and feather-light tickling of Spanish machismo, two particular plot strands stick out. In the first of these, Charro, a feminine transsexual, is saved from a mugging by Paco, a gallant nightclub bouncer (the enormously muscular Rafael Cayetano, previously seen playing Morpho in *El siniestro doctor Orloff* and a criminal heavy in *Sangre en mis zapatos*). A relationship develops between the two of them, although at first Paco doesn't realise that his new girl is a tiny bit more than she appears. In the second strand we meet Juan, a nightclub transvestite whose world seems poised to shatter when his unsuspecting wife and children stumble upon his live show. In keeping with the sunny, light-hearted vibe of the film, however, both of these dramas lead to happy conclusions. Juan's wife and kids embrace their father for who he is, drag act or not, and the film ends with them taking a ride together on a tourist carriage around their home town, a symbol perhaps of the value of seeing your circumstances afresh. Paco reacts violently at first when he discovers that the woman with whom he's been flirting has a little extra downstairs. Slapping her, he storms out of her apartment leaving her desolate in tears. However, in



TOP: Lola (Lina Romay), an actress vacationing on the Costa del Sol.

BOTTOM: Paco (Rafael Cayetano) shows off to Charro (Gina) his transsexual girlfriend.



TOP, from *Las chicas del tanga*: the 'Marqués de Pinohermoso' (José Llamas) and "Artesani" (Antonio Mayans) fight over Muriel (Muriel Montossé).
 BOTTOM, from *Sola ante el terror*: Antonio Mayans's daughter Flavia plays Melissa, the murderous self-image of a disturbed adult (Lina Romay).

one of Franco's most warm-hearted endings our musclebound macho-man redeems himself by abandoning convention, proving that love transcends mere physical details. The last we see of Paco and Charro, he's her personal trainer, and the two of them are at the beach doing calisthenics together. Most films with transgender or transsexual characters include them purely for the angst, trauma and unhappiness they can bring to a story, so it's refreshing that the outcome here is as light, cheery and upbeat for them as it is for the other characters.

Spanish theatrical release: After its initial run of a single week in Seville in 1985, *Las chicas del tanga* popped up again in January 1988 for a short run at El Canadiense, Seville's very own Drive-In (see *Sola ante el terror*). Its short run in Madrid was also followed up, a year later, in 1988, by a further week on reissue in the capital, and a three day booking during Christmas 1989, making it one of the modest successes of the Manacoa stable.

Music: Very little, except for some Fernando García Morcillo compositions with a carnival flavour.

Locations: The film is set entirely on the streets of Benidorm, chiefly around the Avenida del Mediterráneo with its shopping precincts, hotels, seafront bars and tourist trap junkstores, all filmed with the free-and-easy handheld approach pioneered by Franco's revered cinematic icon, Jean-Luc Godard. Artesani takes Muriel to the Plaça del Castell, an ornamental seafront promenade where the vintage Benidorm cannons are displayed.

Connections: See Franco's *Pick-Up Girls* (1981) for another instance of a transgender character handled with sympathy and acceptance, and *Les Ébranlées* (1972) for quite the opposite ... Transvestism almost played a part in the early acting career of Jess Franco, as he told Carlos Tejeda when discussing his role as Venancio, the brother of Paquita (Rafaela Aparicio), in *El extraño viaje*, by Fernando Fernán Gómez: "At first, the character that I was going to play was not that one, it was Rafaela Aparicio's. Fernando gave me to read the script and said: 'You've got balls, you do it'. [...] I would have played the first transvestite in Spanish cinema. I told him I had no problem. But he found Rafaela, who was not known at the time. And he gave me the role of Venancio."²

Other versions: Two slightly different versions exist of this film: one released on Spanish video by Azor Films, the other shown on Spanish TV. Each contains material not present in the other. The video version extends the sequence in which Mayans hustles Montossé when they meet outside a jewellery store, along with another slightly extended scene at home with Juana de la Morena's family. The differences are negligible, insignificant to the story. The TV cut extends by around ten seconds a scene in which Eva León rubs massage oil over a nude Lina Romay, adds a thirty-five second softcore sex scene between Romay and José Llamas, and eighty seconds of a nude conversation on a hotel bed between Mayans and Montossé. These scenes add a little flesh to the film, but they're not exactly pivotal. They do, however, give Llamas's otherwise unsuccessful hustler some much needed bedroom action.

SOLA ANTE EL TERROR

(Spanish theatrical title)

translation: *Alone Against the Terror*

Spain 1983

depósito legal no: M-33.050-1983

Alternative title

Los Monstruos de Fiske Manor (shooting title)

Production company

Mundial Film S.A. (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Mundial Film S.A. (Madrid)

Timeline

Shooting date	November	1983
Depósito legal number	15 October	1983
Madrid	28 July	1986
Seville	09 June	1987

Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
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Video running time

US 'Video Mago' NTSC video	85m47s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. producers: **Herminio García**, **Santiago Moncada**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. editor: **David Raposo**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. song "Annie Lowry" adaptation by **Fernando García Morcillo**. laboratory: **Madrid Films**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Eastmancolor. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candice Coster'] (Melissa Calvo). **Carmen Carrión** (Flora Calvo, Melissa's mother). **Mabel Escaño** (Marta, Flora's sister). **Ricardo Palacios** (Doctor Orgaf). **Ángel Ordiales** [as 'Rafael Izurquiza'] (Angel, Melissa's male nurse). **Flavia Mayans** [as 'Flavia Hervas'] (Young Melissa). **Antonio Mayans** (Mario Calvo, Melissa's father).

Synopsis: *As a child, Melissa Calvo witnessed the death of her father, Mario. Ever since, she has suffered from paralysis brought on by the psychological trauma. As she reaches eighteen, Melissa begins to hear her father's voice at night, imploring her to commit murder in revenge against the conniving relatives responsible for his death: Mario's wife Marta, her sister Flora, and their cousin Enrique. Family servant Angel was also*

implicated, in an indirect fashion. Flora and Marta are now Melissa's 'carers', but all they really care about is inheriting Mario's wealth, which he left exclusively to Melissa. The family physician, Doctor Orgaf, connives in their charade of concern, while Angel is genuinely protective but can do little to help. One night, despite her paralysis, Melissa rises from her bed at the bidding of her dead father, and kills Enrique. Realising that Melissa may be responsible, Dr. Orgaf tells the two sisters that he can have her committed to an asylum, which will make depriving her of the inheritance much easier. While resting outside in her wheelchair, Melissa is approached by David, a folk-rock musician who's been rehearsing with his band in a neighbouring apartment. David tries to seduce her, before being sent packing by Angel. Flora and Marta decide to remove Melissa from her bedroom and lock her in a filthy outhouse, in preparation for her committal to the asylum. Angel eavesdrops on the older sisters discussing their plan and realises that Melissa is in danger. He frees her from the outhouse and drives her away, but when the car breaks down just a few hundred yards from the house, Melissa hears her father's voice demanding that she murder Angel too. She beats him to death with a tyre iron, then passes out beside the body. Flora and Marta arrive at the scene and bring the unconscious girl back to the house. They call Doctor Orgaf for help. He arrives, explaining that the police have found the body of Angel. It will now be easy for him to have Melissa committed for the killings. Orgaf demands a third of the inheritance from the two women, then takes Melissa away to his apartment. Flora, realising she will have to share the money three ways, alleviates the financial disappointment by murdering her sister in the shower, taking advantage of the fact that Marta told Orgaf she was going away that night to live in Germany. Orgaf tells Melissa that Flora is actually her stepmother: her real mother, also called Melissa, died giving birth to her. He also reveals that he hated Mario Calvo for marrying Melissa's mother, whom he desired for himself. He explains to Melissa that her psychosomatic paralysis was a trauma reaction caused by her dying father's blood dripping over her legs. Knowing that Melissa is compelled to kill all of those responsible for her father's death, he takes her back to the house: she creeps up on Flora and stabs her to death. Driving away with Melissa semi-conscious in the back seat, Orgaf gloats that he will now get his hands on all of Mario's wealth. Melissa attacks him and the car plunges over a ravine, killing them both. David is driving past the scene but it's too late to help. Seven-year-old Melissa walks off down the rocky coastline with her father, happy to be with him forever.

Production notes: At some point in 1983 Franco signed a two-film deal with Madrid-based Mundial Films, who financed *Sola ante el terror* (a retread of 1973's *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*) and *Sangre en mis zapatos* (a re-working of ideas from the comparatively recent *La noche de los sexos abiertos*). Mundial was run by Herminio García Calvo and Santiago Moncada Mercedala, the latter of whom would go on to co-produce two more Franco titles, *La esclava blanca* (1985) and *Las últimas de Filipinas* (1985), as well as writing *Juego sucio en Casablanca* (1985). Herminio García Calvo would step forward in 1986 to offer financial support to Franco's *Esclavas del crimen*.

Review: After 1982's *El siniestro doctor Orloff*, Franco's minimalist remake of his classic *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, comes this botched remake of the already less than stellar *Los ojos del doctor Orloff* (1973). Made with a small cast at a single location, it's clear that the financial constraints were considerable, but, as the more interesting films of the period prove, lack of money need not hamper a Franco film. Unfortunately the paucity of funds goes hand in hand with a lack of energy here, which results in a weakening of the experimental frisson that characterises Franco's best low-budget projects. *Sola ante el terror* is competently photographed and reasonably well acted, but essentially lacking in stylistic or narrative ideas. The tiny cast also results in a less than impressive body count, a problem slow pacing exacerbates; basically, this is not a film to quicken the heartbeat of horror devotees. Rather like *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, it is of interest chiefly to hardcore Francophiles who may find themselves in the mood for its shopping list of familiar ingredients.

Wonderful locations aside (see below), the only visual interest comes from the way Franco shoots the killings, cutting back and forth between the young Melissa (Mayans' daughter Flavia, billed as 'Flavia Hervas') and Romay's adult version. This intercutting stresses an intense link between father and daughter, so often conjured in Franco's cinema (*Eugenie; Virgin Among the Living Dead; Al otro lado del espejo*), though it should be noted that while Franco shows the little girl holding a knife, and standing over a corpse with a tyre iron, he doesn't film her actually killing anyone!

Looking to the acting, Escaño and Carrión are both very adept as the 'Ugly Sisters' to Romay's 'Cinderella', giving strong performances that ooze with spite, cynicism and bitterness. Romay is less memorable here, but she does at least add another string to her acting bow – frumpiness. She cloaks her beauty in an aura of dullness and depression, looking uncharacteristically unglamorous and entirely inhabiting her sad and lonely character.

Sola ante el terror is not a *bad* Franco film, it's just that its reiteration of familiar themes fails to rise from the ashes of its forebears. Once again, a woman feels compelled by a supernatural force to commit murder; once again, Lina Romay wakes up screaming from a nightmare; once again a sinister voice soaked in reverb issues hypnotic commands... Of course, given that many will come to Franco's films without knowing their precise order, you could argue that one man's tired third helping is another man's quintessential classic. Perhaps it all depends where you jump on as to which horse on the carousel you regard as the foremost? Franco's cinema is so riddled with repetition and reverberation, and its precise chronology is so difficult to establish, that multiple versions of the same story seem to vibrate in sympathy with successors and predecessors. A fanciful notion, ultimately: *Sola ante el terror* wears its tiredness too blatantly on its sleeve to compete with the films that came before it. For all its occasional charms, this is not a *generative* addition to the Franco canon.

Given the simplicity of the plot, it doesn't help that there are several vague or confusing aspects, the first of which concerns Doctor Orgaf's role in the plot against Melissa. At first it seems

clear-cut: Flora and her sister Marta are plotting with Orgaf to dispose of Melissa and get their hands on her father Mario's money. After the murder of interfering cousin Enrique, Orgaf says to Flora that it would be a good thing if Melissa turned out to be the killer: "If we can prove it, we can lock her up in a mental hospital [...] That way you would get your part of the inheritance. And I would get my part." Orgaf is thus clearly in on the plan to get rid of Melissa. Later, however, after Melissa has murdered Angel, Orgaf informs the two sisters that he knows they killed Mario, and demands a third of the inheritance for his silence. It seems that Orgaf agreed to help the sisters defraud Melissa without telling them that he knew they'd killed Mario: "I've known for a long time and I don't care. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to take advantage of it. I will accept a third of the inheritance." So skimpy is the dialogue that it's difficult, on first viewing, to make sense of his admission: an additional line from Flora ('But we agreed ten percent!') and another from Orgaf ('The price of my silence just went up') would have clarified the shift in his position.

The problems continue when Orgaf decides to use Melissa to murder Flora. He acts as though this will leave Melissa as the sole beneficiary of Mario's will. But how can Orgaf get his hands on the cash with Flora no longer alive to blackmail? A single line of dialogue attempts to convey his not very convincing plan: "When I borrow the money from your family, and no debt will be issued, I swear I will have all the money from the man who stole your mother from me." How can he 'borrow' money from the dead woman? He can't mean he'll borrow from Melissa, having gone to great lengths to prove her legally incapable! At this point Orgaf is unaware that Flora has murdered Marta, so perhaps he means that the latter will 'lend' him the money. But if so, why talk about 'borrowing' at all? Given that he's revealing his wicked plan to the helpless Melissa, surely he would say he was going to blackmail Marta to get his hands on the dough? Whichever way you look at it, the dialogue is incoherent. Franco also seems perversely disinterested in building up a plausible relationship between Melissa and David, the gentlemanly rock singer living next door. They speak just once, and she tells him to leave her alone! Despite the brush-off, he's smitten enough on this brief acquaintance to suggest paying royalties to Melissa for a song he writes after meeting her (it *must* be love!), and after seeing her driven away by Orgaf he's on the verge of forcing entry to the Calvo residence, especially when Flora answers the door and a sound from within the house makes her jump. A cynic might say that the character of David is undeveloped because the story was bashed out in an hour at a restaurant table, with no second draft, but let's not be hasty – by all accounts Franco's own feelings for Lina Romay were love at first sight, so perhaps he was simply drawing on his own experience?

Other inconsistencies arise because of the film's lack of supporting characters. Flora's plan to do away with Marta, without being suspected of murder, rests on the latter having supposedly announced to all and sundry that she's moving away to live somewhere else: "It was your mistake telling everyone you were leaving

forever," Flora gloats, before bashing her sister's brains out in the shower. "You shouldn't have said goodbye [...] No one will ever miss you." This would all be fine, if Marta had been seen speaking to anyone else about her decision. As it is, she doesn't even mention it to Orgaf! This plot point is in fact ported over in its entirety from *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*, the difference being that in that film Marta did indeed discuss her plans to leave, both with Orloff and the police. Unfortunately there are no police in *Sola ante el terror*, another absent detail which hampers credibility: surely the police would be sniffing around Flora, given that her cousin and her servant have both been found dead just yards from her house!

Ten minutes from the end, however, one sequence feels fresh and committed. In the wider world of horror cinema it wouldn't be remotely unusual, but in the strange world of Jess Franco it's almost unheard of. Having just murdered Marta, Flora is applying makeup in a mirror when slowly, gradually, she becomes uneasy, feeling spooked by a number of muted bangs and clatters from offscreen – the sounds you might hear when the wind teases the shutters, populating your imagination with threats and phantoms. Meanwhile, we see the 'young' Melissa walking implacably down a corridor towards Marta's room. Classical suspense is successfully created, and that's odd for Franco who, as I have stated several times in this book, is not keen on suspense and often neglects it entirely. This simple sequence then, made all the more effective by Carmen Carrión's subtle performance, shows that Franco can play the game of suspense if he really wants to; the skill, so rarely used, is easily within his range. It's just a pity he didn't apply the same approach to the whole story, and give it the lift it really needs.

Franco on screen: Although Jess does not appear in the film, he dubs cousin Enrique, an irritating drunk.

Theatrical release: *Sola ante el terror* received only a brief release in Seville, playing for two nights at the Canadiense Drive-In. Surprisingly, there were quite a few drive-ins operating in Spain in the mid-1980s: nine in the provinces of Valencia and Alicante, with others dotted around elsewhere, mostly in the Mediterranean regions. Opening from ten in the evening until three in the morning, they were much the same in design as their American models. 'El Canadiense' – so named because its owner, Antonio Castro, was a Canadian emigré – was located eight kilometres from Seville, and was advertised as the largest in Spain.¹

Video release: Although not widely seen, *Sola ante el terror* was released on video in the USA, in Spanish without English subtitles, by Video Mago Corp, a company based in New Jersey which specialised in Spanish and Venezuelan titles. They also put out Franco's *Sangre en mis zapatos*, alongside such oddities/obscurities as *Las alegres vampiras de Vögel* (Julio Pérez Tabernero, 1975) and *Enseñar a un sinvergüenza* (Agustín Navarro, 1970).

Music: The credits employ the same heavily phased synthesiser music used on the title sequence for *El siniestro doctor Orloff* (1982), just as *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* (1982) shared a title theme with *The Sexual Story of O* (1983). As usual for the 1980s films, the remaining 'score' is mostly familiar from the other Franco films

of the period ("The Taste of Your Sperm" makes a welcome comeback, having last been heard in 1981's *La noche de los sexos abiertos*). A music-box tune and a couple of MOR jazz pieces are the only new recordings. The credits refer to a piece called "Annie Lowry" adapted for the film by Fernando García Morcillo: I can find only one reference to a song with a similar title, "Little Annie Lowry", an obscure ballad by black-face performer W.H. Delehanty, who with his writing partner T.M. Hengler was said to have been "ranked with the best in minstrelsy" ² Note that this is the third Franco film to feature hippy folk-rockers as potential saviours of a trapped woman, the other two being *Midnight Party* and *Ópalo de fuego*. The lyrics of the song sung by (I kid you not) 'David Procop Hutchinson', Melissa's knight-in-shining-denim, are a jumble of English phrases with no discernible connection, like a William Burroughs cut-up of a John Denver lyric.

Locations: The location, once again, is Ricardo Bofill's Xanadu and the Muralla Roja in Calpe. They are, of course, among Franco's most obsessively adored edifices, and here's a treat for aficionados: in *Sola ante el terror* we see them from new angles! The killing of Enrique, for instance, displays Xanadu through the open architectural palisades of the Muralla Roja, emphasising their proximity which is often carefully concealed by Franco's camera angles in other films. Rather carelessly, given that we've never seen them before, Franco neglects to cover up signs on the outside staircase pointing to the Restaurant del Mar and adjoining bar on the lower level of La Manzanera: the location is supposed to be a single residential abode. Also allowed into the film for no narrative reason, Angel drives a car with the name of the Manzanera complex's in-house Indian restaurant ("Mandala") emblazoned on the side!

Connections: As already noted, *Sola ante el terror* is a remake of Franco's 1973 film *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*. The family name has been changed from Comfort to Calvo, but the first names are the same for Melissa, Flora and Marta. The earlier film's pop star character, Davey Procop, aka 'Sweet Davey Brown', has morphed into David Procop Hutchinson for the remount. Quite what's going on with 'Doctor Orgaf' is a puzzle: perhaps Franco felt that it was too soon after the Golden Films production *El siniestro doctor Orloff* (1982) to re-introduce the character by his real name? *Sola ante el terror* rings the changes only in regard to the occult force directing Melissa's actions: rather than the heroine's dead father, in the 1973 version the controlling influence was the living Doctor Orloff. The shooting title of *Sola ante el terror* was "The Monsters of Fiske Manor": Fiske Manor was also the name of the mansion in which *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* took place. This suggests that Franco was fond of the marvellous (and very strange) Charles Vidor movie *Ladies in Retirement* (1941), released in Spain as *El misterio de Fiske Manor*, which told a tale of murder, insanity and blackmail involving three sisters ... Melissa is reading *El informe de Brodie* (aka 'Dr. Brodie's Report'), a collection of short stories by Jorge Luis Borges published in 1970. Written later in Borges' career, the stories were intended by the author as a refinement

and simplification of his writing style, something that echoes what Franco was attempting in his minimalist works of the 1980s. Several of the stories contained in *Dr. Brodie's Report* involve duels or violent rivalries ("The Intruder" for instance, in which two brothers become murderously obsessed with one woman) or possessed characters who enact the antagonisms of others ("The Meeting"). Although the similarities are slight, they're worth pointing out: more often, the books we see Franco's heroines read are of zero significance to the story at hand...

Other versions: None. Katja Bienert is incorrectly named as the star on the poster for this film, so the role of Melissa would seem to have been intended for her. Also announced on the poster (and carelessly carried over to the Spanish VHS cover) were Ann Stern (aka Ana Stern from *Furia en el trópico* and *Sangre en mis zapatos*) and Karen (aka Karin) Field (*The Demons*). One assumes they were lined up to play the roles that went to Mabel Escaño and Carmen Carrión.

SANGRE EN MIS ZAPATOS

(Spanish theatrical title)

Translation: *Blood on my Shoes*

Spain, 1983

Production company

Mundial Film S.A. (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Mundial Film S.A. (Madrid)

Timeline

Shooting date	November	1983
Madrid	17 July	1986
Seville	12 June	1988

Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
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Video running time

US 'Video Mago' NTSC video	95m04s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. producers: **Herminio García, Santiago Moncada**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'José A. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'] and [uncredited] **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording studio: **Arcofón**. *Uncredited*: writer: **Jess Franco**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Carlos aka 'Agent X-27'). **Lina Romay** (Paquita la Fina [SP pressbook: Terry Brown]). **Howard Vernon** (Professor Albert Von Klaus). **Daniel Katz** (Paolo Moroni, aka 'The Italian', a spy). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Boris aka 'Mariano', bearded double agent). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (suave CIA man). **Verónica Arezchavaleta** [listed on poster as 'Ana Stern'] (Lina, a spy). **Eugenia Farach** (Eugenia, ecology spy). **Agustín Gil** aka **Agustín García** [as 'Ramón García'] (Ramón, flashy dancer at club). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'Miguel Casanova'] (abductor at the abandoned discoteque). **Ángel Ordiales** [as 'Angel Santander'] (Abdul Alhazred, the composer). **Juana de la Morena** [as 'Juana Plaza'] (woman abducted at the airport). *Uncredited:* **José Llamas** (abductor #1 at airport). **Jess Franco** (abductor #2 at airport). **Rafael Cayetano** (club heavy).

Synopsis: *Benidorm.* Eugenia, a member of a militant ecology group, is taken by a go-between named Mariano to meet a German scientist, Von Klaus, who lives in a ruined shack at the edge of town. Von Klaus wants to give his plans for a revolutionary nuclear weapon to the ecologists, to restore the balance between the superpowers of the world. He gives Eugenia a music box which conceals the first part of an encoded message. Back at her hotel, Eugenia is ambushed by a couple of foreign agents, Paolo Moroni and Lina, who use a truth drug to make her reveal the secret code. However, Eugenia does not understand the significance of the Professor's gift and can tell them nothing. Lina kills her with a drug overdose. Meanwhile, Von Klaus has disappeared, and when Mariano goes looking for him, he's knocked unconscious by a mystery assailant. Paquita La Fina, a cabaret singer, arrives in Benidorm, and is mistaken for Eugenia's replacement by a man called Mario. Posing as a gigolo on the make, he picks up Paquita and drives her to her hotel. He is in fact a CIA agent (X-27) who is trying to obtain Von Klaus's secret code. At the hotel Paquita is approached by Mariano, who also believes she is Eugenia's replacement. The clueless Paquita has no idea what she's getting into, as Mariano steers her to a meeting at the Flamingo Club, owned by Lina and Moroni. Believing she's being invited to perform her cabaret routine at an upscale venue, she instead finds herself in the middle of a complex web of intrigue and double-dealing. After Paquita's ditsy behaviour confuses everyone, Mariano quietly assures Moroni and Lina that he can deal with the situation: he is, we now realise, a double agent who had been hoping to extract the secret code from Eugenia, and who now believes he must do so from Paquita. Whilst searching Paquita's hotel room for clues, Mariano is shot dead by a well-dressed mystery man who has been observing at a distance for some time. Paquita finds Mariano's dead body in her room, and Carlos helps her get rid of it. At last the two explain to one another who they really are, and Carlos tells Paquita she must help him by continuing to pose as a representative of the ecologists, thus obtaining the secret formula from Von Klaus and handing it to the CIA. If she won't, he'll inform the police about the dead body he found in her room. Paquita refuses, but when he offers her a large sum of money she changes her mind. After performing an excruciating cabaret spot at the Flamingo Club, Paquita receives a letter from Von Klaus summoning

her to the Bravisimo Club on the outskirts of town. There she finds the corpse of Mariano with a music box tucked into his jacket. She takes the box but before she can return to Carlos she's kidnapped by two thugs working for Moroni and Lina. Back at the Flamingo Club, Carlos avoids being bumped off by Moroni's thugs by causing a violent altercation with a customer, which results in the police being called. In a backroom at the club, Moroni and Lina bully and cajole Paquita, trying to extract the information about Von Klaus's formula. In the newly acquired music box Lina finds a note from Von Klaus: "This is the second part; you must put both together." Paquita suggests that the key to the mystery lies in the combined melodies of the two music boxes, but before the villainous couple can deduce any further they are forced to flee by the sound of approaching police sirens. Paquita helps Carlos by interpolating the two music box melodies on a keyboard; the result sounds like an Arabic scale. Carlos's CIA superior, who is hiding nearby, hears the deduction. He orders Carlos to kill Paquita, but Carlos does not obey, having fallen in love with the girl. Later, he meets his boss on the ferris wheel of an amusement park. Having mused over the Arabic music clue, the boss tells Carlos that while travelling from Odessa to Alicante, Von Klaus spent two days in Oran, Algeria, visiting his friend, the composer Abdul Alhazred. Perhaps Von Klaus hid his formula with Alhazred? The two men quarrel and the boss pulls a gun, so Carlos throws him out of the ferris wheel to his death. Carlos and Paquita travel to Alicante to seek Alhazred. They find him mortally wounded, but he tells them to go to a place called Alcazar Alva. At an old abandoned monastery, they meet Von Klaus, who has realised that neither Paquita nor Carlos represent the ecologists. He killed Mariano for the same reason, and has murdered Alhazred too, in order to cover his tracks and keep the formula secret. Carlos kills Von Klaus and takes the formula from his pocket. With Paquita he heads for the airport to fly to the USA. Moroni and Lina attack them with dynamite thrown from a small low-flying plane, but Carlos throws it back and the plane explodes. With Paquita he drives off to collect his reward...

Production notes: Dating the production of this film and its back-to-back predecessor *Sola ante el terror* is quite difficult. The credits do not include the depósito legal numbers, thus withholding one method of placing the films in sequence; neither Antonio Mayans nor Juan Soler can recall exactly when they were shot; and there is very little in-camera evidence to make things easier. *Sola ante el terror* was copyrighted in 1983, so that probably goes for *Sangre en mis zapatos* too, and judging by the overcast weather in both, they was probably either shot between January and April, or October and December. I lean towards the latter period, thanks to a fleeting clue in *Sangre*: during a scene in which Paquita (Lina Romay) is interviewed by Moroni (Daniel Katz) and Lina (Verónica Arezchavaleta), three calendars can be seen on the wall behind them, one on top of the other. Assuming that the topmost is the current one, we have a problem: the image is too out-of-focus to read the current month. However, we can see that it's a month with thirty days, and the last day is a Wednesday (assuming the calendar runs Sunday to Saturday). The only suitable candidate in 1983 is November. This fits with the gloomy weather in the film, so with

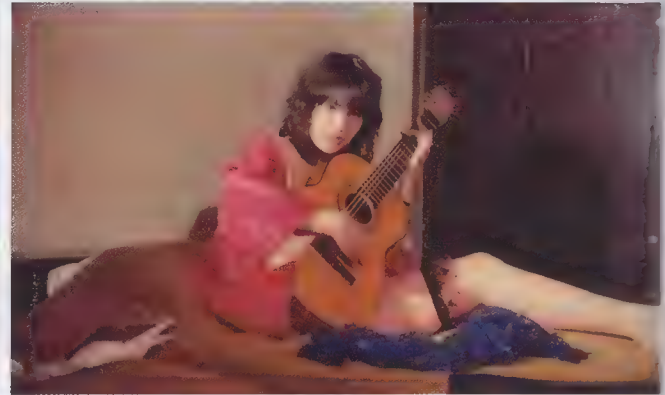
SANGRE EN MIS
ZAPATOS

*Paquita (Lina Romay)
is shocked to encounter
the corpse of double
agent Mariano (Juan
Soler).*



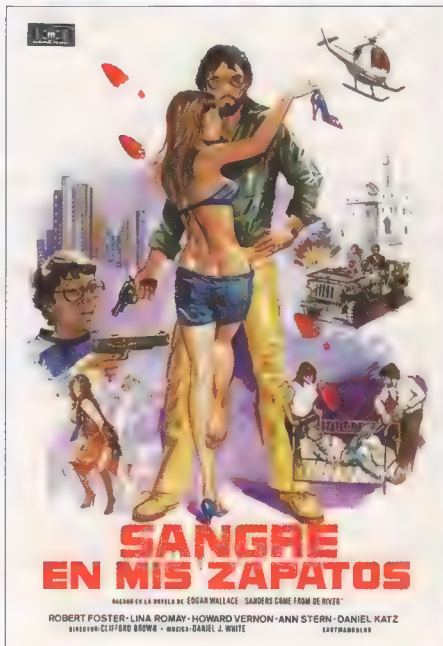
*Paquita (Lina Romay)
takes a beating
from the merciless
Lina (Verónica
Arechavaleta)...*

*Paquita strums while
the spies gather.*



Spanish press-sheet.

*After tossing a man to
his death from a ferris
wheel, Carlos (Antonio
Mayans) throws down
money to distract the
onlookers as he
makes his escape.*



all due caution I suggest a November 1983 shooting date for both *Sangre en mis zapatos* and *Sola ante el terror*.

Review: Could this be Jess Franco's least talked-about movie? Try finding a single substantial review anywhere on the internet! The film's stubborn unavailability in English has pushed it into the background, and even the more obsessive fans have paid it little attention. A hopscotch blend of crime and comedy, it's not one of Franco's more extreme films, offering little of the madness that makes his best work so intriguing, but it's still worth taking a stroll down its Benidorm mean streets to enjoy some of the Francoesque absurdities on offer.

If only for its opening scenes, *Sangre en mis zapatos* deserves some loving. We begin with one of Franco's most dyspeptic establishing shots: a Volkswagen minibus negotiating a dreary urban roundabout on what looks like the rainiest Thursday afternoon ever committed to celluloid. The soundtrack adds a 'bar-is-closed' saxophone melody, getting things off to a phenomenally downbeat start. What follows is a sequence of shots depicting mundane public spaces and unattractive Benidorm tower blocks, photographed at the height of the cloudy season, like something culled from a collection of the worst picture-postcards ever. Only Pedro Almodóvar's *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (another film set in the most aesthetically unappealing parts of Spain) comes close for intentional dreariness. The fact that we're actually seeing the famous Costa del Sol only makes things funnier. In the course of the mid-1980s Franco staked an aesthetic claim to Benidorm and its neighbouring seaside towns, filming their streets as often as Woody Allen did New York's. The details stacked up in the first few minutes are appealing precisely because of how perversely unglamorous they are: a grimy camper-van; overcast skies; a close-up of a yawning man; a bunch of elderly tourists lugging their suitcases onto a coach. The plot 'kicks' into action with two drably dressed undercover spies identifying each other by comparing matching halves of a garden gnome. We really are a long way from James Bond!

Sangre en mis zapatos is pretty talky for what's meant to be a thriller, and the plot is busy without being urgent. Franco treats the paraphernalia of the spy film genre, its double agents and secret codes and villainous ne'er-do-wells, like so much background furniture: it's all there, but none of it comes into focus. Technically the film is quite conventional, lacking the rough edges and hallucinatory fracture of his best work. It's played fairly lightly most of the time, although elements of the grotesque do surface; comedy and horror collide, for instance, when two callous hoods, attempting to administer a drug overdose to an unconscious woman, are momentarily distracted from their wickedness by a jaunty song emanating from a mobile discotheque outside. There are other enjoyable facets too: Howard Vernon is amusing as the pretentious, music-loving old grouch Professor Von Klaus, and there's a wonderfully cynical scene at a fairground, in which a fight breaks out on a ferris wheel between heroic CIA agent Carlos (Mayans) and his surly suspicious boss (Tony Skios). One man

hurls the other to his death, and then to distract the gathering crowd throws a fistful of bank notes. The onlookers forget all about the pulverised corpse and scramble for the cash, allowing the killer to make his escape! However, one has to say that such pearls of Francoesque charm are scattered a little too thinly in the story itself.

Perhaps realising there is not enough plot for the required running time, Franco casts around for something else to pad things out. He chooses farce, using it as a playful distraction when the spy story runs out of twists. Unfortunately, as films like *Celestine*, *An All-Round Maid* (1974), *Elles font tout* (1978) and *El hotel de los ligues* (1982) showed, Franco is not a skilled comedy director, nor is Lina Romay a flawless comedienne. Allowed once again to play her default comedy character – a chatty idiot whose naivety is supposed to be both charming and ribtickling – Romay simply grates on the nerves. Though she dubs her own performance, her delivery is shrill; she tends to blather her lines rather than talk to anyone. Her character is a screwball comedy archetype, 'the bubbly airhead who lands in hot water', but after ten minutes of Paquita's chuntering you wish someone would push her under that hot water rather than help her out of it. A would-be farcical sequence involving four different spies hiding in Paquita's hotel room drags on far too long, and Franco is stubbornly disinclined to use quick cutting to give comic scenes some pace; the actors are left to do their best with the hastily choreographed physical comedy, with little or no assistance from the editing.

Fortunately, after a genuinely funny comedy gambit (a weird 'concert' given by Paquita to a room full of elderly German tourists – see 'Music'), Franco stops fishing for 'lolz' and plows on with the drama. For the last half-hour the film is straightforwardly a thriller. A creepy scene in which Paquita explores a derelict outdoor discoteque lifts the film from the doldrums, especially when a secret agent's corpse plunges into view from a raised walkway, hanging by the neck. The (nominal) shift from Spain to Algeria in the last twenty minutes also adds an otherworldly atmosphere, leading to a tense confrontation in a ruined abbey between Mayans, Romay, and Vernon's maniacal Professor.

No one is ever going to nominate *Sangre en mis zapatos* as an undiscovered masterpiece, but if you've caught the Franco bug I think you'll get some pleasure from it. It's another of those pleasantly odd but neglected little films tucked away in the folds of his filmography. True it has a 'business as usual' feel to it, but even an average day in Francoland is worth a visit.

Franco on screen: Jess is seen only briefly, bundling Juana de la Morena into a car at the airport.

Music: The sax theme over the credits, first used as incidental music in Franco's *Cocktail spécial* (1978), is called "Oceano Nox", and can be found on the 1984 library music album *Mood Selection Ambiance Volume 1*. Elsewhere, the bonkers synthesiser theme to *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* returns, as does the desert exploration theme from *Oasis of the Zombies*. There's a running gag about terrible musicianship, with Howard Vernon raving about musical theory

while bashing tunelessly away on a piano (actually a cheap electric keyboard on the soundtrack). The musical highlight comes when ‘cabaret artiste’ Paquita (Romy) regales a roomful of allegedly high-class customers with a diabolical version of “Greensleeves” played on what sounds like a £99 Casiotone keyboard set to ‘harpsichord’ – undeterred by her tuneless caterwauling and ham-fisted playing, everyone joins in for a singalong. The joke will probably puzzle some, who will scarcely be able to tell the difference between this and Franco’s enthusiastically atonal score elsewhere in the film.

Theatrical release notes: Like *Sola ante el terror* (its production twin), *Sangre en mis zapatos* appears to have received only a very brief release, playing for a week in Madrid in 1986, and two nights at the Canadiense Drive-In near Seville in 1988.

Video release: *Sangre en mis zapatos* was released on video in the USA in Spanish, with no subtitles, by ‘Video Mago’, a company based in New Jersey who specialised in Spanish and Venezuelan titles.

Locations: Benidorm and Alicante. The Belroy Hotel is the prime location, still trading at Av. del Mediterráneo in Benidorm. Scenes shot in an abandoned swimming pool, a disused outdoor disco complex and a ruined deconsecrated church, give the film a compelling air of desolation. A close-up draws attention to the Alicante-Orán ferry, and the action shifts (allegedly) to Orán in Algeria for the last reel, although Antonio Mayans has confirmed the production did *not* cross the Mediterranean. Watch closely and you’ll see the same red-robed figure in three different shots, presumably a member of the production team wrapped in a vaguely Arabic piece of fabric in order to ‘sell’ the outskirts of Benidorm as the northern shores of Algeria.

Connections: According to Franco in *The Manacoa Files*, this is a “hyper-faithful” version of the original script for *La muerte silba un blues*, which in 1962 underwent numerous changes before reaching the screen. However it’s far closer to a script Franco sold to Italian producers around the same time, for the Tulio Demicheli film *Da 077 intrigo a Lisbona* (in which a secret agent is sent to Lisbon to recover a secret formula, devised by a German Professor, which neutralises the effects of a dangerous weapon developed by an enemy nation) ... The use of a piece of music to encode a sought-after secret formula harks back to *Kiss Me Monster* (1967) ... *Sangre en mis zapatos* also reworks elements from the far superior *La noche de los sexos abiertos* (1981), which can lead to confusion as they’re separated by only two years. Both films end with Lina Romy and Antonio Mayans trying to uncover the secrets of a man called Von Klaus: in the first film it involved his stash of Nazi gold, while in *Sangre en mis zapatos* it’s his formula for building an atomic bomb. (Incidentally, there is no appreciable connection between the Von Klaus mentioned here and the murderous lead character in 1962’s *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*.) ... The scene in which Verónica Arechavaleta, Daniel Katz and Antonio Rebollo (plus Juan Soler as a dead body) hide in various places in the same cramped hotel room exhumes a mouldy comedy stand-by

previously indulged in Franco’s 1978 teen sex comedy *Las chicas de Copacabana* ... Abdul Alhazred, composer of the sought-after musical code, is of course named after a certain ‘mad Arab’ of ill repute who wrote the fiendish occult tome ‘The Necronomicon’, as referred to in the stories of H.P. Lovecraft ... According to the press sheet for the film, *Sangre en mis zapatos* was based on the Edgar Wallace book *Sanders of the River* (1911): however, given that the Wallace book concerns the travails of a paternalistic British Colonial Administrator responsible for ‘keeping the peace’ along a stretch of river in Nigeria, such a claim is blatantly absurd...

UNA RAJITA PARA DOS

(SP theatrical title) *A Pussy for Two*

Spain, 1983

depósito legal no: illegible except for the year 1983

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Altamira Films

Timeline

Shooting date	circa December	1983
Madrid	13 August	1984
Cartagena	22 October	1984
Seville	17 November	1984
Barcelona	10 December	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain 87m

Video running time (converted)

SP ‘Valfer’ PAL VHS 87m09s

Notes: The Spanish Ministry of Culture lists the film’s Madrid premiere as 1 August 1984, but I can find nothing to support this assertion in the press sources currently available to me.

director: **Jess Franco** [as ‘Lulu La Verne’]. assistant director: **Lina Romy** [as ‘Aldo Pajini’]. director of photography: **Francesco del Pi Tofuera**. editor: **Nina Parrusi**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as ‘Cheno Mamboliques’]. music: **Daniel White** [as ‘Victor ‘Chichi’ Nabeira’]. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *Uncredited:* camera operator: **Jess Franco**. script: **Jess Franco**, from an idea by **Lina Romy**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu La Verne'] (Agent 69/89?). **Rosa María Minuner** [as 'Minina Coster'] (Linda, Agent 24). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Mamie Kaplan'] (Olga, Agent 47). **José Llamas** [as 'Johnny Poyales'] (Dimitri, a Russian dancer). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Tommy Porcili'] ('La Loca'). **Emilio Linder** (Italian client). **Jess Franco** (Soviet spy chief). **Carmen Carrión** (reader of erotic novels). *The following pseudonyms may belong to those already mentioned:* **Mela Metes**. **Mama del Fina**. **Rene Boludez**. **Pastueñez**. *SP video cover gives lead cast as:* Lia Kaplan. Tynis Fox. Joe Flamer.

Synopsis: *Agent 69 sends two female spies, Linda and Olga, into the field, with microfilm secrets hidden up their asses. After a session of cunnilingus with their boss, they check into a hotel and befriend Dimitri, a young Russian dancer and political radical. Monitoring these international developments with a secret wire tap is 'La Loca', a screamingly camp spy whose desperation to obtain the microfilm leads to him squeamishly removing the desired capsule from a woman's ass with a pair of tweezers. But has he obtained the genuine microfilm? And if not, where is it hidden?*

Production notes: *Una rajita para dos* was the first sex film Franco made specifically for Fervi Films, a porno production company that arose to satisfy the demand for new product after Spain legalised hardcore in 1984. (*Un pito para tres*, although begun earlier, was initially shot as a 'back-pocket' softcore production during the making of *Mil sexos tiene la noche* for Golden Films: it only became a hardcore film when Franco added new material in 1984, at which point he sold it to Fervi). Over the next two years Franco directed six more films for the same company: *El chupete de Lulú* (1985), *El ojeté de Lulú* (1985), *Entre pitos anda el juego* (1985), *El mirón y la exhibicionista* (1985), *Las chuponas* (1986) and *Para las nenas... leche calentita* (1986). Not one of these films is interesting cinematically, and as pornography they are hopelessly ineffectual. The Fervi productions had just one important reason for being: they kept the wolf from the door at a time when Franco was finding it harder and harder to get regular movies made.

Italian Franco scholar Francesco Cesari reports that the film's approval date was 22 March 1983. However, given that this is a hardcore project through and through I find it difficult to square this information with the situation in Spain at the time. It seems to me far more likely that the film was made towards the end of 1983, when the law pertaining to hardcore was about to change. I think it's likely that Franco then decided to shoot a film specifically tailored to the hardcore market, a course of action he was unlikely to have decided upon in early 1983. Note too that a late 1983 production date fits perfectly with Antonio Mayans's physical appearance in the other films of that period: in *Una rajita para dos* he has short hair and a moustache but no beard, just as he does in *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espia?* and *Juego sucio en Casablanca* which were shot in the first few weeks of 1984. In early 1983, however, he was bearded and wore his hair longer.

Interviewed in 2002, Antonio Mayans explained how these films were made: "[They] were initially shot in the afternoons, at the same time as the other films, using those actors who were willing to make them and were not ashamed. They were cheap to make so they worked out well financially ... Whenever we made a film and then – say, after lunch – we also made a little porn movie, a few hardcore scenes, using the available crew and actresses, then it was just a matter of editing it and getting it sold. Fernando Vidal would give us some money and then he would sell it."¹

Like all except one of the sex films Franco shot for Fervi, *Una rajita para dos* is played as a comedy, in this case concerning shady individuals attempting to retrieve a stolen microfilm hidden in a woman's culo by secret agent Lina Romay. It's a tad more elaborate than the subsequent Fervi films, with slightly longer scripted passages, but it sets the template for what was to come; a handful of fuck and suck scenes, and a comedy tone that's either jaunty or just silly, according to your taste. Franco himself declared the Fervi films uniformly dreadful: "The results were distressing. I have never been more eager to retire to a convent or become a Trappist hermit."² Romay, gamely posing as the director of the Fervi films (see *Las chicas del tanga*), was likewise unenthusiastic when looking back: "I don't think I have any talent as a director ... Now I don't like any of those at all. I was disappointed."³ It seems that the transition from softcore to hardcore gave neither Franco nor Romay the thrills they required. Certainly for Jess, the tease, the slow reveal, the deferral of pleasure, were the essence of cinema; facial cum-shots were not.

Review: *Una rajita para dos* was conceived by Franco as his first fully pornographic film for exhibition in the newly created 'Sala X' cinemas, which opened for business for the first time in Spain in March 1984 [*Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, though it came out a month earlier, had started out as a softcore film, with hardcore inserts added later.] Franco has stated that the 'S' certificate films he made in Spain between 1979 and 1983 were a 'golden age' for him; the sort of cinema he preferred to make being essentially a kind of 'hard softcore'. So having crossed the threshold into pornography, how does *Una rajita para dos* measure up? The simple answer is, it doesn't. It may be hardcore but it lacks urgency, vigour or animal passion, with slapstick and corny satire taking precedence over erotic abandon.

The first shot is certainly an 'eye-opener'. While the soundtrack contributes a humorous jazz number, a woman inserts a tiny red capsule (microfilm, we're informed) into another woman's rectum, while holding a magnifying glass over the exposed orifice. The combination – obscene image plus comedic music – is alienating and flatly unerotic. It seems to me a resentful beginning; the image is 'giving the audience what they want' (hardcore close-ups) but the magnifying glass insinuates directorial sarcasm ('is that explicit enough?'), 'penetration' is with a tiny capsule rather than a phallus, and the music undercuts any possible arousal. It's often said that jokes express sublimated hostility, and this opening

sequence, for all its jollity, seems to me an act of aggression, a kick against those who demand to see more. As Franco himself told me in 2010: “*With my hardcore films, they were hardcore but I tried to make them not be hardcore.*”

Una rajita para dos, a porno parody of the spy genre, suffers from an incessant torrent of dialogue, a logorrhoea that afflicts many other Franco-Romay hardcores (see *El ojete de Lulú*). This presents major difficulties when assessing the film; unless you have a perfect grasp of Spanish, certain elements of obscene word-play and comedic banter will pass by unappreciated. What's evident though, as Franco wades grudgingly into the hardcore arena, is that his chirpy frivolity is much less convincing than the darker, sadomasochistic thrills of films like *Lorna... the Exorcist* or *The Hot Nights of Linda*. One imagines the impetus for this change of approach was Lina Romay, whose bubbly character in Franco's hardcore films is certainly their most striking feature. The unfortunate effect, however, is to steer Franco away from the strongest currents of his work into a paddling pool of fatuous comedy. A protracted scene in which a female spy (Mari Carmen Nieto) shaves the pussy of her associate (Rosa María Minuner) is rendered completely unerotic as Minuner sings a mock aria and giggles incessantly throughout. There's something faintly neurotic about such buffoonery, as if it's there to render everything more 'positive' and less 'crude'. Even when Minuner has José Llamas lick her shaved pussy, she continues giggling idiotically. It's as though arousal *has* to be accompanied by 'fun', like a potentially off-message politician chaperoned by an over-zealous spin-doctor. That Llamas sings pompous communist songs while fucking Minuner's shaved capitalist slit may be momentarily amusing, but it suggests Franco is having difficulty embracing hardcore sex for its own sake; instead he feels the need to ironise or send it up. It's interesting that in the one fuck scene where the actors seem absorbed and passionate, he sabotages the mood. In the threesome scene with Llamas, Rosa María Minuner and Mari Carmen Nieto, as the joking subsides and pleasure begins to take over, Franco turns passion-killer, scoring the scene with a twee little ditty for electric piano. It's the audio equivalent of the director twiddling his thumbs and staring out the window.

What was Franco's problem with hardcore? I believe there were two aspects to it, one arising from his personal sexual orientation and the other from his creative practises. He'd filmed explicit sex before (see 'Connections'), though significantly it was often between women. I suspect that on a personal level what turned him off most was having to shoot sex scenes with the male as an active agent: hardcore pornography demands that the camera should dwell upon penetration, mostly by the phallus, and no amount of coy camera placement can get away from the fact. In 'traditional' hardcore the penis is an essential ingredient. This must have been a problem for Franco because it conflicts with his essential disregard for men in sexual situations. To make matters worse, with the penis comes the problem of male arousal. If the actor loses an erection the scene cannot proceed, so if you

want an aroused penis in your film you have to sustain the right working ambience to maintain it. This means the male performer can demand certain things: the sex must serve his erotic needs. For a director, unless you're lucky enough to find one of those rare men who can get an erection to order, you will probably have to cede the dynamics of the sex scene to your male cast; they, after all, will know when they are about to droop, and to avoid this calamity will inform the director and/or steer the sex accordingly. Franco's hardcore films are cursed with half-hearted 'semis' and wilting erections, which suggests that he was not prepared to allow male performers to seize control of the sexual dynamics. On most heterosexual porn films, the prioritising of male needs is second nature: even though the female performer is the focus of sexual interest, the culture of pornographic filmmaking is male-dominated. (This has changed to a degree with the advent of stronger female involvement in the industry, but it remains the default setting.) Faced with someone having difficulty maintaining an erection, one imagines impatience from Franco (time is money!) and a disinclination to indulge the performer. To Franco's impetuous and frugal nature, erections are like special effects: boring, time-consuming and annoying. In this context, the relentless 'comedy' in Franco's hardcore films could either be his response to the problem of male arousal (no need to worry about making things 'hot' when the film is played for laughs), or a subconscious sabotaging of it (it's hard to 'get into the zone' when the director and your co-stars are treating everything as a giggle). Meanwhile, on the creative level, another problem that may have turned Franco against hardcore is that when it really works, the actors are in charge. Porn becomes exciting when the performers overtake the simulation of 'making a film' and cruise into a genuine state of arousal, with its own dynamics and power. In hardcore, the actors are really having sex, and that reality is at odds with Franco's preferred mode of filmmaking in which arousal is created through the interaction of the camera and the actors. Jess paints desire with his lens; the actors are guided by his voice off-camera [as attested to by actress Alice Arno in a 1975 interview for the French adult film magazine *Sex Stars System* and confirmed by Franco in *Murderous Passions*] while he assembles the lineaments of desire through camera angles, camera motion, and selective framing of the bodies. In other words, the sexual aura of his work comes from the camera's relationship with the performers. In hardcore, however, the performers are 'directed' by a higher power than the camera: their brain chemistry. This demotes the camera to a mere documentary device, and it's this, I suspect, that led to Franco's creative dissatisfaction with hardcore, and his later dismissal of his hardcore films.

Other porno filmmakers have successfully combined sex and humour, but they generally draw the line at sending up the sex itself. There's no such care taken here: *Una rajita para dos*, like all Franco's hardcore films with the exception of *El mirón y la exhibicionista*, is played incessantly for laughs. There is nowhere for sexual pleasure to hide from the intrusion of cornball comedy.

By the time we've reached the scene in which Romy 'grazes' on two penises simultaneously whilst a double-speed tune for military trumpet and drum cavorts over the top, the film's notion of wit has reached its lowest ebb. Was Franco looking at the two penises and thinking of soldiers on parade? If so, that's not comedy; it's doodling in the margins of your work. To top it all we get comedy dubbing for the resulting orgasms, sabotaging any possible sexiness with what sounds like a fight in the dubbing booth between cartoon cavemen, or W.C. Fields taking a dump in the corner of the studio. As Antonio Mayans, playing a camp spy called 'The Queen', skips off into the sunset, kicking his heels à la Morecambe and Wise, you may think you've just seen the nadir of Franco's career, but in fact this pretty much sets the seal for his remaining hardcore films of the 1980s...

Franco on screen: Casting himself as a Woody Allen *schlemiel* spying on the action from the safety of balconies or behind sofas, Franco gurns like a refugee from a Carry On film; definitely not his finest hour.

Cast and crew: José Llamas, who is often 'the bearer of the penis' in Franco's hardcore films, was a friend of Franco's, one of his most reliable repertory actors who appeared time and time again in the 1980s films. According to Antonio Mayans, Llamas was essentially gay, and was living with a male lover at the time of shooting these films, although his facility for vaginal penetration and cunnilingus suggests at least a functional bisexuality.

Music: Supper-club jazz, glorified lift music, comedy military cues and old-time schmaltz drench the film from beginning to end. The light at the end of the tunnel is a jaunty piece for bass guitar, piano and drums on loan from *La comtesse noire*.

Locations: Benidorm.

Spanish theatrical release: *Una rajita para dos* nowadays only survives as a blurry, almost unwatchable VHS, horribly duplicated by the Spanish VHS company Valfer, but in 1984 and 1985 it was one of the regular mainstays of the 'Sala X' phenomenon. It opened in Madrid in August 1984 and played for an uninterrupted five weeks. In November it opened in Seville, where it played for three weeks, then in April and May 1985 it was back in Madrid for another five weeks. Again and again it was scheduled in the Sala X programmes, returning throughout 1986 and 1987. Evidently it was a crowd-pleaser and found a niche in the affections of Spanish sex film audiences in the newly liberalised market of the mid-1980s. Such financial success presumably explains why Franco, despite his self-confessed dislike of the results, went ahead and shot another eight hardcore porn films between 1984 and 1987.

Connections: Franco had filmed hardcore scenes for his movies as far back as 1974, when he added explicit porno close-ups to *Female Vampire* (creating *Les Avaleuses*) and *Exorcism* (creating *Sexorcismes*) ... That ever-present Franco watering hole The Flamingo Club get another mention, and the female spies trigger memories of happier times, namely Franco's 'Red Lips' films, *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster*.

CLAIRE

(IT theatrical title)

Composite film using Franco material but not created by him

France & Italy, 1978-1983

Production company

Unknown (onscreen credit goes to the defunct Comptoir Français du Film Production)

Timeline

Franco material shot	Jan-Feb	1978
D'Amato material shot		1981
Rome	31 January	1984

Theatrical running time

Italy	95m
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'*Claire*' onscreen credits: director: **Clifford Brown**. story: **Robert Hugue**. adaptation and dialogue: **Robert Hugue & Robert De Nesle**. music: **Robert De Nesle**. editor: **Claude Gros**. director of photography: **Alain Hardy**. produced by **Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris).

Cast listed onscreen: **Chantal Virapin. Martine Fléty. Pamela Stanford. Uncredited: Beni Touxa. Aida Vargas. Mel Rodrigo. Brigitte Lahaie. Didier Aubriot. Susan Hemingway. Lina Romy. Manlio Cersosimo. Gabriella Tricca. Paula Teutscher. Sonia Bennett.**

Supervised by Italian exploitation dynamo Joe D'Amato, *Claire* is an amalgamation of material from Jess Franco's *Elles font tout*, *Cocktail spécial* and *Je brûle de partout*, mixed into a gloppy gumbo with a copious wad of *Le ereditiere super porno* (1981), the latter a film credited to Claudio Bernabei (aka 'Alexander Borsky') which may have been co-directed by D'Amato himself. Put together for an Italian cinema release in 1984, it repeats the method used in D'Amato's 1979 mash-up *Justine*, which pulled together material from Franco's *Midnight Party*, *Shining Sex* and his super-rare *Julietta 69*. In *Claire*, the process is facilitated by the fact that both *Elles font tout* and *Le ereditiere super porno* are about multiple couples shagging in a hotel, which helps to give the illusion of a unified setting. The aim was obviously to cut together as many sex scenes as possible, and from that point of view *Claire* is a stunning success; from any other angle, however, it's an incoherent mess.

Among the absurdities: in a scene from *Cocktail spécial*, Eugénie (Beni Touxa) reads an erotic novel by Martine de Bressac (Aida Vargas), who in a revealing close-up can be seen displaying her pussy on the book cover. However, we've already seen Vargas downstairs playing a lowly chambermaid, in footage from *Elles*

font tout, so either we're not supposed to notice that this celebrated author of erotic novels is manning the hotel reception desk, or else we're meant to assume that poor Martine's books don't sell very well! Just to add to the disorientation, all three Franco films are in academy ratio while the D'Amato film is closer to 1.85:1.

Claire is not without a few points of interest. For instance, D'Amato has taken the implied anal penetration of Susan Hemingway from *Je brûle de partout* and given it a hardcore makeover, with insert shots culled from elsewhere of a fully erect penis explicitly hitting the target. Note, however, that these close-ups are not from *Le ereditiere super porno*, nor any of the Francos. The same goes for two other scenes at the end of the film, so it's clear that a fifth or even sixth film has been 'milked' for additional material. Although the only copy of *Elles font tout* currently in circulation is the Italian dub, called *Quel certo sapore*, D'Amato's *Claire* redubs new Italian audio, with different dialogue and different names, making this the second Italian revision of Franco's original! Ending abruptly with an enigmatic freeze-frame of Beni Touxa, *Claire* feels like a rough edit knocked together in a couple of evenings, deemed releasable by a hasty distributor even though it was still a work in progress. Ultimately, the audience for a film of this kind won't have hung around to see more than twenty minutes anyway, and if they did, narrative logic will not have been a priority...

Music: An entirely new score, using neither Daniel White's music for the Franco films nor Nico Fidenco's perky themes for *Le ereditiere super porno*.

Other versions: During 1984, three films with the word 'Claire' in the title played in Rome's porno theatres: the first, *Claire*, opened on 31 January, *Claire lingua viva* followed on 8 May 1984, and *Claire... dove scivola scivola* appeared soon after, on 25 May. No poster artwork has surfaced for plain old *Claire*, but the posters for *Claire lingua viva* and *Claire... dove scivola scivola* both bear the credits for Jess Franco's 1977 film *Blue Rita* (four of *Blue Rita*'s cast are named – Olivier Mathot, Chantal Virapin, Pamela Stanford, Martine Fléty – and the director's credit goes to 'Clifford Brown', one of Franco's most frequent pseudonyms). The presence of Chantal Virapin and Martine Fléty in *Claire* might tempt us to assume that either *Claire lingua viva* or *Claire... dove scivola scivola* is a retitling of that film; especially when you realise that *Claire lingua viva* and *Claire... dove scivola scivola* were released in Rome during the same month! It wouldn't be the first time erroneous credits had appeared on an Italian Franco release. Cutting and pasting the credits from a more successful release would not be unthinkable in the dog-eat-dog world of Italian porno releasing. Until prints of these films turn up there will always be some doubt, but it seems likely to me that *Claire* is a separate film to the other two, while both *Claire lingua viva* and *Claire... dove scivola scivola* were variant releases of *Blue Rita*, perhaps one being softcore and the other hardcore ... Film historian Robert Monell reports that there are in fact two different versions of *Claire*, with different hardcore inserts in each.

¿CUANTO COBRA UN ESPIA?

(SP theatrical title) *How Much for a Spy?*

Spain, 1984

depósito legal no: M-11.062-1984

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cinema International Corporation (CIC)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa January	1984
Depósito legal number	21 March	1984
Madrid	28 May	1984
Seville	19 September	1984
Barcelona	22 October	1984

Theatrical running time

Spain	86m
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Video running time (converted)

SP 'Malibu Video' PAL VHS	86m36s
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Francisco Beringola**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. art director: **Carlos Spitzer**. assistant production: **José Miguel Martí** [sic]. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Almirall']. music: **Fernando García Morcillo**. camera equipment: **Aguayo**. electrical equipment: **Gecisa**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Fujicolor. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Juan). **Lina Romay** (Ana). **Emilio Linder** (Albert). **Alicia Príncipe** (Carla). **Eva León** (Countess Irina Von Karnstein). **Antonio Mayans** (Prince Albino Radetti). **Analía Ivars** (Marga, the jogger). **Carlos Isbert** (Ahmed). *Uncredited:* **Flavia Mayans** (child throwing confetti at the married couple). **Ivana Mayans** (child throwing confetti at the married couple).

Synopsis: *Newly-weds Juan and Ana are on their way to their honeymoon hotel in the seaside resort of Benicàssim, where Juan, a composer, hopes to premiere a new composition at a music festival. En route they pick up two hitchhikers, Albert and Carla. Juan's car breaks down, and while Juan and Ana walk to a nearby garage to fetch water for the radiator, their passengers, actually two spies on the run, hide a microfilm in the car. When Juan and Ana return, their passengers have*



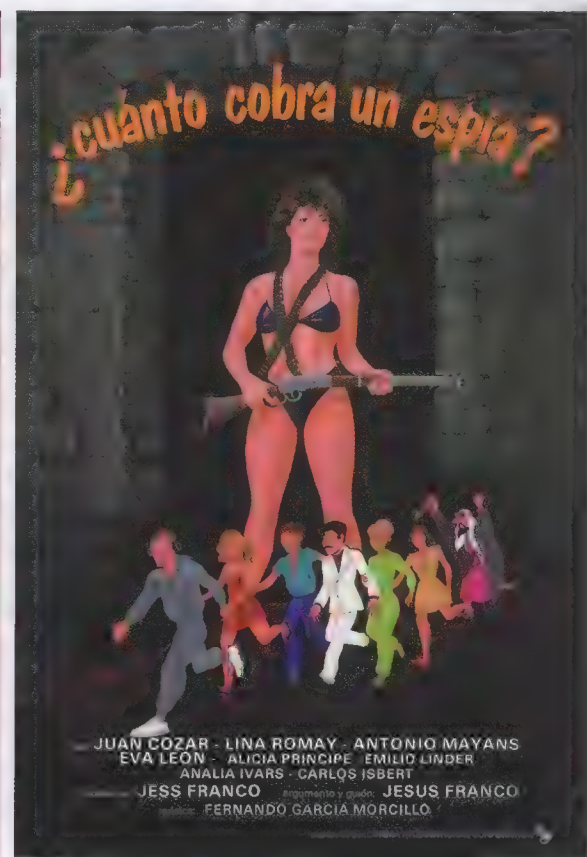
¿cuánto cobra un espía?

JUAN COZAR - LINA ROMAY - ANTONIO MAYANS - EVA LEON
ALICIA PRINCIPE - EMILIO LINDER - ANALIA IVARS - CARLOS ISBERT

dirigida por: JESS FRANCO

distribuida por CINEMA INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION





LEFT: Juan (Juan Soler Cózar) pulls an unexpected manoeuvre in the twist-laden climax of *¿Cuánto Cobra un Espía?*, filmed in the Convento Carmelita a ruined Trinitarian convent outside Benicàssim. RIGHT: Spanish pressbook and st

disappeared. Later, at the hotel, Albert and Marga pop up again, and try to retrieve the microfilm. The married couple find themselves not only besieged by the attentions of Albert and Marga, but also several other interested parties, including the stern, Germanic Irina Von Karlstein, her Argentinian playboy lover Prince Albino Radetti, and Carla, a jogger who is not as sweet and innocent as she seems...

Review: A light and sunny comedy thriller, *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espia?* stars Lina Romay and Juan Soler as a newlywed couple, Ana and Juan, beset on all sides by spies looking for a secret audio recording which has been hidden in their luggage. The neurotic Ana is convinced that her hubby, a dorkish composer of musique concrète, is about to be seduced by other women wherever they go, a delusion which the persistent attention of two female spies does nothing to assuage. The plot then ambles good-naturedly through a succession of farcical set-ups, as two pairs of comedy crooks (Mayans and León, Linder and Príncipe) and a mystery actress visiting the region (Ivars) disrupt the couple's honeymoon in their search for the missing MacGuffin.

Even by the gentlest of critical standards, this Manacoa production is at the feather-light end of the scale. A general air of fooling around and holiday high spirits makes it as cheerful and pleasant a film as Franco ever concocted. Whether the effervescence of the project translates into genuine comedic fizz, however, depends on how much of Lina Romay's rather shrill jealous wife routine you can handle. As in *El hotel de los ligues* and *Sangre en mis zapatos*, Romay is playing a chatty bimbo whose bubbleheaded naivety is supposed to be comical, and as in those earlier films she turns in a dubbing performance that grates even more than her cutesy mannerisms. Romay's true talent lay in the darker and sexier regions of Franco's cinema: she was peerlessly strange and unnerving in films like *Female Vampire* (1973), *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973), *Lorna... the Exorcist* (1974) and *Die Marquise von Sade* (1975). But here, like so many actors who yearn to stretch their wings and prove themselves as comic talents, she steps beyond her limits and ends up simply annoying. Eva León, on the other hand, is genuinely funny as the hard-faced Germanic spy who rolls her 'r's so hard she sounds like a demented road drill, and Antonio Mayans plays his greasy sleazy playboy to the hilt, crafting for the screen a predatory shark who would not have been out of place alongside Steve Martin and Michael Caine in the French Riviera comedy *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (1988).

The star of *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espia?* is Juan Soler, whose lighting skills and behind-the-camera technical advice helped Franco to achieve the clean, colourful appearance he was looking for throughout the 'Golden Films' period. Soler took numerous supporting roles in films such as *Oasis of the Zombies*, *El hotel de los ligues*, *Sangre en mis zapatos*, *Las chicas del tanga*, *Juego sucio en Casablanca*, and *Bahía blanca*, but *Cobra* was his only lead part. He is in fact very relaxed and easy-going in the film, and has no trouble at all delivering what's required. For much of the time it's his job to play straight man to Romay's paranoia, which he achieves with

aplomb, and some eye-rolling close-ups to indicate the character's long-suffering irritation in the face of Ana's hysteria.

The secret information which everyone is striving to obtain turns out to be a 14th century Muslim potion designed to cause an especially ghastly sort of death, as the secret agent on the hidden tape recording reveals: "Everyone will suffer from super-diarrhoea with deadly effects! I know because I tried these herbs, and now I'm shitting to death!" According to this unfortunate fellow, two milligrams of the substance would be enough to poison the whole of the West! What a climax that would have been... The question of who is really a spy is eventually answered, but it exceeds the bounds of necessity for me to reveal the answer here; if you're going to watch this film, you'll need all the surprises the paper-thin story can muster.

Franco on screen: Franco does not appear, but he provides the voice for Carlos Isbert's character. In the interview published in Vol.1, Franco declared that "One of the films from this period that I prefer. Because, I think it's very funny."¹

Music: After a title theme that sounds like it was written for an afternoon TV game show, Fernando García Morcillo's bland middle-of-the-road jazz bumbles along for the duration of the film like muzak in a casino lift, with no attempt made to synchronise with the changing fortunes of the characters ... Daniel White's sweet and melancholic theme from *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* pops up unexpectedly, like a ghost from another world, during a scene in which the Germanic Countess Irina Karnstein plays guitar and sings to Juan after dinner at her posh chateau ... Juan Soler's character is a modernist composer, whose recent work, "Mariposa 2", is a dark and foreboding slice of musique concrète allegedly based on the electronically treated sounds of insects and birds ('mariposa' means butterfly), which brings to mind Trevor Wishart's groundbreaking and often disturbing musique concrète masterpiece *Red Bird: A Political Prisoner's Dream*, recorded in 1978.

Locations: Shot in Benicàssim (sometimes spelled Benicàsım) in the province of Valencia, in and around the glamorous Hotel Orange, with extra material in Castellón and Madrid. The climax of the film takes place at the Convento Carmelita, a ruined Trinitarian convent outside Benicàssim.

Connections: "I want to go to Cadaqués," says Ana, "Because that painter with the moustache drives me crazy!" She is of course referring to Salvador Dalí, who lived in a seaside villa in Port Lligat, near Cadaqués ... When Ana becomes jealous of her husband's encounter with the jogger, she hysterically accuses him of being "Casanova! Landru! Travolta!" In between the famous Italian womaniser and the disco-dancing Scientologist is the Parisian serial killer Henri Désiré Landru (1869-1922), who between 1915 and 1919 murdered a string of wealthy widows for their money. The Landru case was the basis of two films no doubt well known to Franco: Charlie Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) and Claude Chabrol's *Landru* (1962) ... Like *Sangre en mis zapatos*, made just a few months earlier, *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espia?* ends with Lina Romay and Antonio Mayans tangled up in a shoot-out between spies at a ruined church or monastery.

JUEGO SUCIO EN CASABLANCA

(SP theatrical title) *Foul Play in Casablanca*

Spain, 1984

depósito legal no: M-11.192-1984

Alternative title

Sale jeu a Casablanca (FR video)

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cinema International Corporation (CIC)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa January	1984
Depósito legal number	22 March	1984
Date of approval	05 October	1984
Seville	14 February	1985
Barcelona	17 June	1985

Theatrical running time

Spain 102m

DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Filmax' PAL DVD 99m36s

director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Santiago Moncada**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as J. Mayans]. assistant producer: **José Miguel García Marfa**. art director: **Carlos Spitzer**. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. hair: **Regina Hervás**. wardrobe: **Peris Hermanos** [as 'Péris, hnos.']. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Mara Almirall']. editors: **Jesus Franco & Lina Romay**. music: **Julián Sacristán**; published by **Harmony** (Madrid). camera equipment: **Aguayo**. lights: **Gecisa**. transport: **Ocsa**. props: **Fontana**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Fujicolor. *Uncredited*: producer: **Jess Franco**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **William Berger** (Dean Baker). **Analía Ivars** (Jill Prentiss aka Jill Evans). **Muriel Montossé** [as 'Silvia Montez'] (Shirley Brewster). **Antonio Mayans** (Freddy Blankton). **Ricardo Palacios** ('Papa Yul'/Julius Brewster). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Charlie Stratford, card player in floral shirt). **Luis Barboo** (Duke Foreman, older card player). **Alfredo Kier** (Steel, card player in striped blazer). **Ángel Ordiales** (Ali, a gun-seller). **Juana de la Morena** (receptionist at the real Brewster offices). **Carlos Mendy** (Wendy Casling, accountant for Julius Brewster).

Jorge Laverny (Edward, Baker's book-keeper). **José Llamas** (bongo-player for exotic dancer). **Miguel García** (bongo-player wearing hat). **Lina Romay** (woman having book signed at Baker's book launch).

Synopsis: *Casablanca*. Dean Baker is an American writer married to the heiress Shirley Brewster. His marriage is in trouble, inspiration has failed him and he's taken refuge in alcohol. After experiencing a humiliating encounter with a prostitute, Jill Prentice, and learning from his wife that she's going to divorce him, he tries to commit suicide, but fails. After vainly asking for money from his publisher and his accountant to get back to the States, Dean picks up Jill and she persuades him to go to a very exclusive club, owned by the obese Papa Yul, where illegal poker games take place. The other players are Jill's pimp Freddy, drug addict Charlie Stratford, ex convict Duke Foreman, and Steel, a homosexual. After an incredible winning streak, which earns him fifty thousand dollars, the drunken Dean devises a mad scheme: he distributes the four aces of the game to his partners: the holder of the ace of hearts will have his money if he kills Dean within one week. The following day, when Dean remembers the deal, he returns to Papa Yul's club to cancel the 'contract', but it's too late. Dean comes into possession of his four alleged killers' addresses from Yul, but the other players are offed one by one by someone unknown. After surviving many murder attempts with Jill's help, Dean eventually finds out that Freddy has the ace of hearts, and that he's Shirley's lover: the poker game was just a pretext to get rid of Dean. Jill kills Freddy, and she and Dean escape. Later on, though, at his home, Dean is killed by an unknown hand... However, this turns out to be the ending of Baker's last novel, written out of spite and bitterness after his initial suicide attempt and unsuccessful quest for money and based on real-life characters, all of them associates in his wife's firm. Dean threatens to press charges against them, as he discovered that they are part of a drug contraband ring. Soon, though, Dean's accountant is killed by Freddy and Dean himself survives a real murder attempt: the attacker is Jill, who was in cahoots with Freddy. She's shot by the police and Dean leaves, while Shirley begs in vain for him to come back.

Production notes: Ascertaining the precise shooting date of this film is not as simple as it first appears. It bears a 1984 depósito legal number, but as Antonio Mayans has explained elsewhere in this book, there was often a delay of weeks or even months between the shooting of a Franco film and its submission to the Spanish registration authorities. That said, 1984 also tallies with an interview given by William Berger: straight after shooting *Juego sucio en Casablanca* Berger went on to his next picture, the Duccio Tessari Western *Tex e il signore degli abissi* (shot in Spain in 1984 and released in Italy in 1985); when a strike hit the production he was able to take two days off to film material for another film which Franco had begun immediately after *Juego sucio en Casablanca*, called *El asesino llevada medias negras* (see next entry). If the currently available shooting information for the Tessari film is accurate, that puts *El asesino llevada medias negras* in 1984, and so *Juego sucio en Casablanca* ought to be 1984 too, or at the earliest

WILLIAM BERGER en JUEGO SUCIO EN CASABLANCA

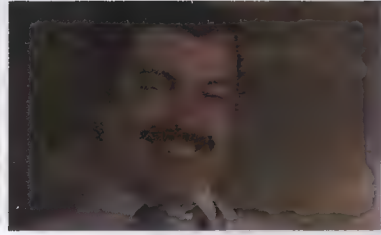
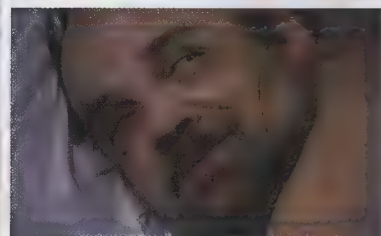
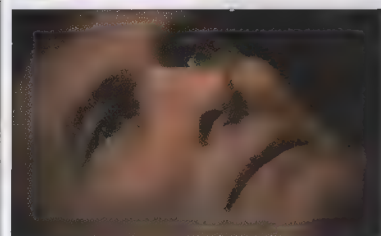
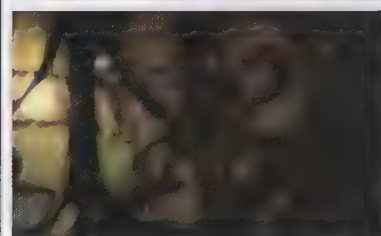
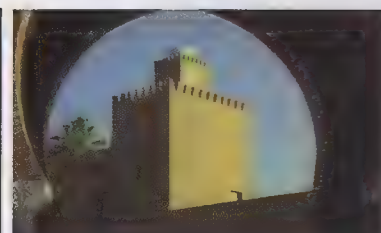
con Analía Ivars,
Carlos Mendy, Antonio Mayans,
Silvia Montez, Ricardo Palacios, Juan Cozar,
Jorge Laverny, Luis Barboo, Alfredo Kier

un film escrito por Santiago Moncada

y dirigido por JESS FRANCO

Una producción MANACOA FILMS

distribuida por CINEMA INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION



PICTURE: Spanish pressbook. RIGHT, FROM TOP: The Castillo de Bil-Bil in Benalmadena, Papa Yul's base. (2) Dean Baker (William Berger), novelist, fantasist, alcoholic. (3) Baker's existential crisis heads towards suicide. (4) Papa Yul (Ricardo Palacios) enjoys an oily rub-down. (5) Baker contemplates his fate. (6) Steel (Alfredo Kier) sets his transvestite friends on Baker. (7) Freddy (Antonio Mayans) expresses his scorn for Baker.

December 1983. But then, what are we to make of the scene in *Juego sucio* in which Berger's character visits his book-keeper's office, and a calendar on the desk reads February 1983? Is the calendar out of date? The scene is shot on location, so the incidental details of décor are real, not set dressing. One possible explanation is that the location was not currently in use, in which case the calendar maybe shows the last month anyone worked there. Otherwise we would need the Duccio Tessari film to have been shot in March 1983, which although not impossible requires a greater shift in accepted information. With this in mind it seems prudent to stay with 1984.

Review: This downbeat meditation on mid-life crisis, despair and disappointment is one of Franco's finest films of the 1980s. Based on a screenplay by Santiago Moncada, and boasting an excellent central performance from William Berger, it's an unqualified success that merges visual style, storytelling skill and genuine emotional heft into one immaculate construction.

Berger plays Dean Baker, a man once fêted as "*the most original and sensitive writer of our century*" by *The New York Times*, now a washed up alcoholic whose failed emotional life and sinking prospects are so hopeless that he can't stand himself any longer. "*One can feel bad, or sad, or afraid,*" he says, "*But tiredness is the worst. You know you'll never get to the moon. Or write a good book. And that love is routine. And so you feel tired*". After trying and failing, twice, to commit suicide, he concludes he's so great a washout as a man that he can't even finish himself off. The second of these suicide attempts takes place on a railway line, and it adds a far less sympathetic detail to the lead character: a grandiose narcissism that endangers not only his own life but others' too. He parks his car in front of an oncoming train and, not satisfied with planning a major rail accident, embraces Jill, a friendly hooker who is sitting in the passenger seat, and refuses to let her go. "*Let death surprise us in each other's arms,*" he implores. Bad enough that he should choose a suicide method that endangers so many other lives, but to actively grab onto a struggling woman to prevent her from scrambling clear of danger? Baker is truly contemptible in this scene. In a development that feels like something drawn from the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, we're then asked to care about this man throughout the rest of the story! It's a high stakes game that Franco is playing, and it depends upon the willingness of the audience to accept a deeply unsympathetic lead character. Instead of the comforts of identification we must be happy to understand, or simply observe. While the story may draw upon American film noir, it thus owes more to Continental art cinema, where audience identification figures are less sacrosanct. We can feel sympathy when Baker describes his plummeting self-worth, his feeling that life has given all it has to give him, and his weariness with striving ever harder for less and less reward. But when self pity turns to aggression and endangers other people, we are tempted to step away and regard him as a monster. It's maybe only because Jill herself is so peculiarly forgiving that we allow the moment on the railway tracks to pass...

After the failed railway suicide, in a scene more pivotal than at first we understand, Jill takes Baker to a card game arranged by her pimp, Freddy (Antonio Mayans), at a club owned by the enormously obese Papa Yul (Palacio). Drink follows drink, wager follows wager, and amazingly Baker wins \$50,000. Wallowing in a boozed-up cocktail of misery and euphoria he makes a deal with the other players. He signs the ace of hearts, and then distributes all four aces randomly among the four players. The person with the signed card wins the \$50,000 on condition that they kill Baker. The next day, sobering up, he returns to the club to undo what he's set in motion. Papa Yul, however, wants none of it. The game is on. As murder attempts and dead bodies pile up, Baker finds his appetite for life back with a vengeance...

Such is the meat of the plot, and the first thing to note is that it's strikingly different in texture to Franco's work so far. Essentially a film about a man's character under extremes of existential despair, it feels like a welcome glass of ice cold water after the woozy humidity of Franco's habitual delirium. Male character studies are simply not his stamping ground; the closest would be his crime thrillers of the early 1960s such as *Rififi en la ciudad* and *La muerte silba un blues*. So what possessed Franco to turn to this story? It is, after all, written by someone else; did he thirst for a holiday from his own writing talents? Did something in the story grab him and force its way to the screen? It's interesting that this particular story should emerge in the mid-1980s, when Franco's career is sliding into a downturn marked by cynicism (the hardcore films), low energy (*La chica de los labios rojos*) and frivolity (*¿Cuanto Cobra un Espia?*). With the demise of the 'S' certificate, Franco's beloved horror-erotica was becoming commercially unviable, and European genre cinema itself was receding in popularity, to the point where it was near-impossible to sell low budget, independently produced films abroad. Such a cocktail of disappointment, self-doubt and commercial bad news may have led to an increased susceptibility on Franco's part, both to the filming of another writer's script and to the dark and troubled tone of the story itself. Then there was the state of play with Franco's erstwhile financial backers, Golden Films International; according to Franco and Antonio Mayans, the company began stockpiling finished films without releasing them commercially, and failed to pay money owed from the earlier films. What had seemed like a perfect deal, with total freedom and a regular demand for more product, had turned sour, with only one more Golden Films production, *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*, making it into cinemas in 1985. Franco must have been seething with anger, disappointment and perhaps humiliation.

At this point, I have to say beware: *Juego sucio en Casablanca* pivots on an extraordinary plot twist very unusual for Franco, so if you'd rather not know it you may want to skip the rest of this review (assuming you haven't already read the synopsis). The film employs a structural device, about fifteen minutes from the end, which requires us to reassess everything we've seen so far. This is in fact a tale within a tale. The inner layer terminates with the murder of the lead character: we then pull back to an 'outer reality'

to discover that most of what we've seen so far is from Dean's forthcoming novel, which we see him reading to his wife, his agent, and assembled business partners. Each of them was represented in the story, with certain details true and others invented. Baker has woven a story from the dregs of his private despair, using the machinations and petty greed of those around him. His publisher, seen earlier unwilling to advance his writer a paltry \$2000, immediately offers to buy the book. The others are not so thrilled about the way they've been portrayed. Threats are issued, tempers snap, and the next round of vengeful death unfolds...

It's only in retrospect, once the central twist has occurred, that certain details add up. For instance, the opening scene with Jill, in which a girl we assume is a hooker refuses a client's money, makes sense as an idealisation of a woman instead of the real thing; a real hooker would have taken the money, a woman who wasn't a hooker would have slapped the sonofabitch in the face. Likewise Jill's unaccountable willingness to lavish affection on a man who tried to kill her in a forced 'suicide pact'. "*After that night in the motel I thought a lot about you. I always hoped we'd meet again,*" the real Jill says, and belatedly we realise that the scene on the railway line never happened; it was pure invention, an expression of Baker's self-loathing, which just goes to show what we could have been missing if we'd bailed too early. The script even gave us a hint about what was happening: when Baker tried to persuade Papa Yul to help him annul the agreement, the callous Yul replied, "*A curious situation. You could write a novel, if you have the time.*" Of course, it turns out that what we were seeing was in fact just that; a novel dramatised before our eyes, making this the only example of literary recursion in a Jess Franco film. *Juego sucio en Casablanca* is certainly a wealth of surprises!

This is a sensitively directed, often beautifully filmed story based around committed and compelling performances. Everyone is on good form, although the honours must go to Berger, who shines throughout. Antonio Mayans is excellent and deeply sinister as the shark-like Freddy; Muriel Montossé the perfect choice for the wife, either mean and contemptuous or sorrowful as the story demands. Franco has evidently focussed his talent to make the best of the story: the attention to detail is remarkable. For instance, when Baker opens a drawer at the office he rarely visits, the newspaper lining the drawer is in Arabic. A small detail which cements the impression of a Morocco shoot, even though filming took place in Spain. Juan Soler's lighting and Franco's camerawork, with its recurrent fixation on rain (sorrow) and mirrors (introspection), are matched for elegance by directorial choices such as the card game scene, in which the sound of laughter and cursing is replaced by a moody North African composition. The low budget is evident, but Franco uses his minimalist palette adroitly to sum up his lead character's narrowing horizons: lingering close-ups of Berger's weathered face communicate not only the emotions within the character, but also the diminished, foreshortened world into which depression and despair have cast him. After a couple of years in which a sense of diminishing returns was beginning to corrupt

the Franco filmography, *Juego sucio en Casablanca* revives your admiration and makes you wish he'd filmed other people's scripts more frequently.

Cast and crew: Sometimes a cast member would forget that Franco's films were being made at a speed that didn't allow for the usual niceties, as Antonio Mayans recalls, "*Analia Ivars would ask for more nail varnish, even in the jungle during Golden Temple Amazons! Juana would refuse, then Analia would run off and hide behind a tree and put more on herself. On Juego sucio en Casablanca, in the last scene, she dies, remember? There is a shot of her at night, with William Berger there and Muriel Montossé. Analia is shot and then she falls dying. She's lying there on the ground, and it's starting to rain a little, and Analia wanted Juana to do her make-up! Jess is jumping with annoyance, saying, 'There is no more light, no no!'*"¹

Music: Kicking off with a marvellous Arabic composition, *Juego sucio en Casablanca* rings the changes on the soundtrack too. Instead of the by-now predictable patchwork of Daniel White cues, we're treated to new sounds in keeping with the drama; Arabic traditional music, and Arabic-flavoured pop music for the disco scenes, interspersed with a beautiful new piano melody that tangentially recalls André Benichou's music for *Le miroir obscène*.

Locations: A concrete pedestrian walkway down which William Berger runs to escape from Papa Yul's hoods is the same one seen in *Botas negras, látigo de cuero* and *El siniestro doctor Orloff* (1982) which means at least some shooting took place in Torremolinos. We also get another visit to The Castillo de Bil-Bil in Benalmádena near Málaga, as featured in *Mil sexos tiene la noche*. The credits declare that shooting also took place in Melilla, a Spanish autonomous province on the North African coast near Morocco.

Connections: The script by Santiago Moncada recycles much of his 1975 screenplay for *Juego sucio en Panamá* directed by Tulio Demicheli, including the major twist, the character names, the washed up writer Dean, and the sequence in which the hero is beaten up by a pack of transvestites. The story itself contains echoes of Jules Verne's *Tribulations of a Chinaman in China*, in which a man bored with life, upon learning that his business is on the verge of collapse pays someone to assassinate him, but then changes his mind and must elude the assassin. (It was filmed in 1965 by Philippe de Broca, starring Jean-Paul Belmondo.) ... Dean Baker's novels include "Tales of an African Lobster" (title borrowed from a 1953 jazz composition by Milton "Shorty Rogers" Rajonsky); "A Place Called Nowhere"; "Milestones" (a 1958 album by Miles Davis) and "Cross Faces" ... When Jill introduces Dean to Papa Yul she calls him "*a friend*", to which Papa Yul responds, looking at Dean, "*An American friend. Welcome.*" Baker is indeed American, but the remark comes across as loaded, and may be intended by Franco as a reference to *The American Friend* (1977), a neo-noir directed by Wim Wenders, about a man who uses subterfuge to trick another into committing murders. (Roger Ebert in his review of *The American Friend*, commented "[Wenders] challenges us to admit that we watch (and read) thrillers as much for atmosphere as for plot. And then he gives us so much atmosphere we're almost swimming

in it" – words that could apply equally to *Juego sucio en Casablanca*. And for once we really are swimming, not drowning!) ... Franco was no stranger to recursion (a narrative structural device creating a 'hall of mirrors' effect): it was a defining feature of his first film, *Tenemos 18 años* (1959).

Other versions: A rarity among the 1980s Manacoa productions, the film was sold abroad, making it onto French video as *Sale jeu a Casablanca*.

EL ASESINO LLEVADA MEDIAS NEGRAS

Translation: *The killer wore black stockings*

UNFINISHED

Spain, 1984

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Timeline

Shooting date circa January 1984

writer/director/producer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Javier Perez Zofio**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. music: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**.

Cast: Sandy Edwards. William Berger. Lina Romay. Mabel Escaño. Antonio Mayans.

Production notes: Franco had previously tried to shoot a film called *The killer wore black stockings* (as *L'assassin portait des bas noirs*) in 1975, while shooting *Mandinga*. In 1984 he resurrected the title, though not the storyline, for *El asesino llevada medias negras*, with one of his favourite actors, William Berger, in the leading role.

In a 1992 interview with *Obsession* co-author Christian Kessler, Berger explained that he had joined the Franco production for two days during the making of a Duccio Tessari Western, *Tex e il signore degli abissi* (shot in Spain in 1984 and released in Italy in 1985). Tessari's shoot had been suspended briefly due to industrial action, so Franco used the time to grab as much footage with Berger as possible, which according to Berger was pretty much all of the 48 hours at his disposal! Yet despite Franco's apparent enthusiasm for the project, *The killer wore black stockings* once again failed to get its legs over the finishing line. Years later, he was still talking about it, even declaring his intention to reshoot some of the earlier material featuring Antonio Mayans and Lina Romay to match the new material he had planned (a decision probably forced upon him because Romay had noticeably gained weight in the intervening period).

In 1985, Giuliano Gemma, Berger's co-star in *Tex e il signore degli abissi*, told the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* about the Tessari production: "The greatest difficulties we had were because of the heat in Spain, and because of the horses. Horses that, after ten minutes, were exhausted and dripped with sweat, so we must continually change them or let them rest." When asked why the production went to Spain, he replied, "Because there's an area that is very reminiscent of Arizona landscapes, and because there are still some western villages that are no longer present in Italy. It turned out to be cheaper to go around there than to rebuild these villages in Italy." Asked about the film's budget he responded, "Well Tessari says that just as you do not ask a woman her age so you should not ask how much a movie cost. Anyway, I can say that the estimate was around 1.4 billion lire. But perhaps it cost a little more for certain unforeseen delays."¹ No doubt the delays to which Gemma referred were the strikes which enabled Berger to take time off to shoot for Franco.

Cast and crew: *El asesino llevada medias negras* reportedly saw Javier Perez Zofio return to the Franco fold, for the first time since 1973. Zofio was credited as camera operator on many of the films Franco made for Harry Alan Towers (including *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, *The Girl from Rio*, *Justine*, *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* and *Count Dracula*), and his name continued to crop up on the Spanish credits for Franco's films with producer Arturo Marcos (including *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Der Tödesracher von Soho*, *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*, *Un capitán de quince años* and *The Demons*). Zofio also cropped up as the credited camera operator on Franco's debut Manacoa production *Un silencio de tumba* (1972) and his name is often attached to the unreleased *El misterio del castillo rojo* (1973). His last Franco credit of the 1970s, apparently as director of photography, was for Franco's gothic giallo *The Night of the Skull* (1973). Working out which films he really worked on is complicated, however, by the fact that Franco often served as his own camera operator, especially on the smaller films, and in the 1970s he covered this fact by crediting various French and Spanish dps instead of using his own name. Photos from the set of the Towers production *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* prove that Zofio worked on that film, so he almost certainly worked on the other Towers productions too. Whether or not he was involved in films such as *Vampyros Lesbos*, *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* or *The Demons*, however, is debatable, and I find his credit for *Un silencio de tumba* highly unlikely, given that this was a Manacoa production, made on the most frugal of resources, and thus a film one would expect Franco to have shot himself. Nevertheless, Zofio would apparently go on to shoot Franco's 1996 'comeback' film, *Killer Barbys*.

Connections: Franco once said that *El asesino llevada medias negras* shared some of the jazz spirit of his 1968 film *Venus in Furs*, a connection borne out by the presence of an obscure black jazz trumpeter, Sandy Edwards, in the lead role. Franco had originally intended *Venus in Furs* to be about a black jazz musician who falls for the supernatural blonde of the title, a casting choice that was apparently nixed (for flagrantly racist reasons) by the film's backers

Commonwealth United. Unfortunately I've been unable to trace any information about Sandy Edwards: he does not appear to have made any records, and I can find no concerts listed in the available Spanish news archives. It's possible that Franco either misremembered or mispronounced his name in the original interview, but searches for 'Andy Edwards', 'Randy Edwards', 'Sandy Edward' and 'Sandy Edwin' have also proved fruitless...

LA CHICA DE LOS LABIOS ROJOS

(SP theatrical title) *The Girl with Red Lips*

Spain, 1984

depósito legal no: M-30.696-1984

Alternative title

La mujer de los labios rojos (SP video cover)

Production companies

Gabriel Iglesias Martín (Madrid)

Manacoa Films

Theatrical distributor

Unreleased theatrically.

Timeline

Shooting date	circa May	1984
Depósito legal number	05 September	1984

Running time (converted)

Spanish work-print	93m13s
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*According to official records, *La chica de los labios rojos* was registered for a depósito legal number under the title *Los blues de la calle pop!*

writer/director/co-producer: **Jess Franco**. *Uncredited*: executive producer: **Gabriel Iglesias Martín**. director of photography/camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Terry Morgan, "Labios Rojos"). **Karin Dior** (Tina, Terry's friend). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster'] (Alfredo Pereira). *Uncredited*: **Trino Trives** (Emir Kal-Mahan). **José Llamas** (Bryan Hobson). **Fata Morgana** (Melissa Kal-Mahan). **José Miguel García Marfa** (Moran, man seeking the diamond). **Mabel Escaño** (Linda Suarez, woman seeking the diamond). **Jess Franco** (Professor Caramé). **Diego Porta** (Diego Caputo).

Synopsis: *North Africa: Terry Morgan, a female private detective nicknamed 'Labios Rojos' who moonlights as a nightclub performer, is hired by the Emir Kal-Mahan's secretary to help find Melissa, the Emir's daughter, who has disappeared with the most fabulous piece of her father's collection: the Kal-Mahan diamond. The Emir suspects guitarist Bryan Hobson, his daughter's boyfriend, of organising the kidnapping; what's more, he tells Terry that he has been contacted by a man named Freddy Moran who offered to sell him back his diamond. Terry and her friend Tina arrive in Tunis where they have to get in touch with a certain Diego Caputo, but Detective Al Pereira is also after Kal-Mahan. To get information from Terry, Pereira poses as a gay antiquarian named Polito: Terry sends her friend Tina (who poses as Countess Irina Camelocci) to seduce him. Others are looking for the diamond as well: Terry is caught by Moran and his accomplice Linda Suarez, who captured Caputo and obtained information about Terry's appointment with Professor Caramé, an eccentric Armenian millionaire. Linda goes to the appointment posing as Terry but finds Caramé dying: before he expires, he gives her a paper in Arabic. Pereira rescues Terry and takes her back to her hotel, but then it's Tina's turn to be kidnapped by Moran (who mistakes her for Terry). Pereira finds out that Moran and Linda work for Melissa, who hired them to buy the diamond for her. Moran kidnaps Terry once again, as he and Linda wrongly believe she knows where the diamond is. Bryan and Melissa show up and take Terry away. But who's got the diamond? Eventually Terry and Tina face the real Emir Kal-Mahan, who has had the diamond in his possession all the time. Kal-Mahan had posed as his secretary (and vice versa) and the stolen jewel was a fake: he had set up all the chase to fraud the insurance company and poisoned Caramé who had been his accomplice all along. In the ensuing chaos, the diamond changes hands many times: Pereira gets it, but Terry and Rita have the last laugh.*

Production notes: Jess Franco's *La chica de los labios rojos* (1984) is currently available only as a grimy scratchy chalk-marked work-print, which was transferred to videotape and released in Spain in the mid-1980s (with the cover title *La mujer de los labios rojos*). It never played in Spanish cinemas, or anywhere else: instead it exists in a curious limbo, tenuously available but somehow remote. In many ways it's the sole representative of all those supposedly finished but unreleased Franco films (*Voces de muerte*, *Barrio chino*, *Teleporno*, *Las tribulaciones de un buda bizco*, and so on) whose canisters are either long gone to land-fill, or are yet to be excavated from obscure dusty storage. Sadly we will probably never see this film as it ought to be seen. It's almost certain that the work-print was never sent to a neg-cutter, therefore no genuine master negative was assembled and no 35mm film print was struck. The only way we'll ever see this movie properly is if someone finds the raw negative footage, has it digitally transferred, and then assembled and mastered as per this work-print...

Review: A low-energy meander through the comedy spy motifs that seem to be Franco's fall-back position whenever sex and horror are out of fashion, *La chica de los labios rojos* is a difficult film to love. Not only is the story pretty weak, and the sex-and-violence

quotient minimal, but the only version we can see today presents a 'perfect storm' of visual obstructions: a beaten and battered work-print, bearing numerous editor's chalk-marks, conveyed via an ugly brownish video transfer which hides fifty percent of the detail. Is there a decent film in there somewhere, waiting to be revealed one day on gleaming Blu-ray? In all honesty, much as I would love to see it properly restored, I doubt if *La chica de los labios rojos* will ever knock anyone's socks off. It feels depleted, like a car out of petrol with just enough momentum to keep rolling, but not enough to pick up speed. The plot hinges around various characters pretending to be someone else as they scramble to find an enormous missing diamond, but the characters themselves lack vitality. A procession of familiar faces (José Miguel García Marfa, José Llamas, Lina Romay, Antonio Mayans, Mabel Escaño) are joined by a few recent arrivals (including Karin Dior as a rather doughy 'red lips girl', and dignified Trino Trives, soon to be seen in the vastly superior *Bahía blanca*) but the infusion of new blood fails to refresh the scenario and everything dribbles by in desultory fashion. Scenes plod on for minutes at a time (Romay and Dior spend an eternity in a hotel bathroom, chatting and showering and putting on make-up, like something from a 1960s Andy Warhol film), and for a director whose scripts often ran to just a handful of pages there's an awful lot of chatty inconsequential dialogue.

There is some nudity here and there, but when Lina Romay and Karin Dior hang out in the bathroom together they are shot from the waist up, with none of the lingering crotch shots one grows accustomed to in Franco's post-sixties work. Meanwhile the two sexual encounters are quite chaste by Franco standards. In both cases they are played as comedy; seeking to gain information about Melissa and the missing diamond, the Red Lips girls take it in turns to seduce Al Pereira, who is posing undercover as a wealthy homosexual antique dealer called Polito. In order to maintain his facade of gay disinterest, Pereira remains fully clothed, so the Red Lips vixens simply lie face down on top of him, giving us nothing except a sustained shot of their nude rear ends. This may be fine if you're madly in love with Lina Romay's bottom, but there's not a lot going on if it's action you're looking for. At least some of the dialogue is amusing: when Tina takes a stab at seducing Pereira by posing as the lascivious Countess Irina, he rebuffs her in character as Polito, saying "*All women remind me of my poor mother, God rest her soul.*" Undeterred, Tina responds, "*So, wouldn't you fancy a little incest?*" Ultimately, however, there's not much erotic charge to these frolics. Violence is thin on the ground too, unless you count the startling scene where Al Pereira fetches Terry a series of hard slaps across the face, followed by a pulverising gut-punch, a scene which pays off when Tina creeps up behind Pereira and smashes a large ceramic pot over his head. Considering that Pereira and the Red Lips girls are probably Franco's favourite recurring characters, this encounter feels like a knockout contest designed to establish a definitive hierarchy: naturally enough given Franco's oft-aired feelings about the relative merits of men and women, Pereira must take second place.

So the film has problems. But if we could see what Franco intended us to see, we might forgive at least some of its failings, because on closer inspection it appears to be rather beautifully lit. Franco opted to shoot mostly with natural light for this project, and the results demonstrate his technical skill even when working without his trusty lighting cameraman Juan Soler at his side. Sometimes the effect is tenebrously elegant, other times it's purposely harsh and strident: in one scene, shot next to a plate glass window, the sunlight streams in so imperiously that poor old Tino Trives, who has pages and pages of dialogue, has to shield his eyes with his hand. With little artificial enhancement, the film's play of gleam and gloom is inscribed into the celluloid by Franco's creative positioning of the camera. Interiors are illuminated by pools of light amid inky shadow, and with just a wide angle lens and some judicious use of window-blinds he manages to make an out-of-hours Arabic restaurant look mysterious and menacing. Cool and shady hotel lobbies are suddenly bleached out into headachy brightness as sunlight catches the lens, while characters loom amid fronds of interior vegetation to spy through layers of intervening glass, turning the film frame into a chequerboard of reflections and superimpositions. Perhaps, with a decent digital transfer, these visual details would compensate for the drawn-out dialogue and clichéd character interplay? It would be very interesting to know...

Franco on screen: Franco appears briefly, in a small role as a nervous gangster.

Music: For this late return to the Red Lips formula, Franco dips into numerous old scores spanning three decades of his work: we hear the moody whistling theme from *Rififi en la ciudad* (1964), some action-packed big band cues from *Kiss Me Monster* (1967), the sleepy jazz theme from *Kiss Me Killer* (1973), the moody title theme from *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975), a smoochy jazz number from *Ópalo de fuego* (1978) and a melancholy rumination from *La noche de los sexos abiertos* (1981). While it's a pleasure to hear pieces from so many different periods of Franco's career, I'm less convinced by the wisdom of using the same music on the credits as was previously used for *Pick-Up Girls* (1981). Just a year before, *Sola ante el terror* (1983) had dressed up its credit sequence in freeform electronics ported over from the credits to *El siniestro doctor Orloff* (1982), making this the second regrettable lapse in imagination for a director who usually at least tries to shuffle the fixtures and fittings of his obsessively cyclic cinema.

Locations: Benidorm and Benalmádena stand in for North Africa, with the soundtrack's smattering of Arabic music picking up the slack.

Connections: This is another in the line of 'Red Lips' films which began with *Labios rojos* (1960) and blossomed with the back-to-back comedy thrillers *Sadisterotica* (1967) and *Kiss Me Monster* (1967). In the opening scene, Terry flashes her nude body to distract the driver of a car; then, after he swerves off the road, she purloins the document he's carrying and pins a mocking note to his trapped body: this last detail echoes the opening of *Labios rojos*. Terry plays trumpet in a nightclub, echoing Janine Reynaud and

Rosanna Yanni's Red Lips duo, who pose as saxophonists in *Kiss Me Monster*. When Al Pereira poses as a gay antique dealer, it's a shout back to the role played by Franco himself in *Sadisterotica*, as is the scene in which Tina poses as a wealthy noblewoman to try and gain information from him ... The credit sequence concentrates on a close-up of a gemstone held to the light, echoing the title sequence of *Ópalo de fuego* (1978) ... There's something slightly forlorn about the decision to cast Lina Romay as a singular 'Red Lips' girl; the lipstick symbol is no longer the sign of a female duo taking on crooks and cops alike, but the calling card of one woman, which inevitably smacks of diminishment ... The last time we saw Pereira he was being conned by a Romay femme fatale in *Camino solitario*, before which he was murdered by another Romay villainess in *Botas negras, látigo de cuero*. Plus ça change! This would be Pereira's last outing until *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* in 2012 ... Karin Dior wears the same pair of 'tribal mask' ear-rings which Romay wore in *Sangre en mis zapatos*.

BAHÍA BLANCA

(SP theatrical title)

Translation: *White Bay*

Spain, 1984

depósito legal no: M-33.526-1984

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Unreleased theatrically.

Timeline

Shooting date	circa June	1984
Depósito legal number	26 September	1984

Intended theatrical running time

Spain	85m
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video running time (converted)

SP 'Azor Films' PAL VHS	92m22s
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director: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. make-up: **Juana de la Morena** [as 'J. de La Morena']. art director: **Carlos Spitzer**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans Hervás']. music: **Julián Sacristán**, sung by **Isabel Saenz de Tejada**. music recording: **Harmony**. camera equipment: **Aguayo**. lights: **Gecisa**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio

[and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Fujicolor. *Uncredited*: producer: **Jess Franco**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Eva León** (Alida aka 'Mandanga'). **Lina Romay** (María). **Antonio Mayans** (Comisario Carlos Fernandez). **Tino Trives** (Leon Maderos). **Analia Ivars** (Silvia Maderos). **Antonio Rebollo** [as 'Tony Skios'] (Raul Sebastián). **José Llamas** (Andy Sebastián). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Ramiro Sarmento, the pathologist). **Ángel Ordiales** [as 'Ángel Santander'] (Rufo, Raul's henchman). **Jess Franco** (Oscar, 'El Miserias'). **Juana de la Morena** (woman watching at quayside). **Flavia Hervás** (girl on the quayside). **Vanessa de la Morena** (2nd girl at quayside).

Synopsis: *The body of Pocho Martín, a young fisherman, has been discovered in the waters of Bahía Blanca on the sleepy island community of Conejera. Pathologist Ramiro Sarmento, having examined the body, believes the youth was murdered. However, Ramiro's old friend, the local Comisario Carlos Fernandez, had recorded the death as a drowning accident. An old man called Oscar, known to the locals as 'El Miserias' (The Misery) claims that the death is linked to Deer Island, a small rock facing the bay which Oscar claims is inhabited by two evil sirens who seduce fishermen using a magic light. Carlos and Ramiro decide to visit the island in question, where they meet two women who run a tavern there. One of the women is Alida, or 'Mandanga', an old friend of Carlos from his hell-raising days, the other is Alida's sister María, a mute. Meanwhile Silvia, daughter of León Maderos, a bar owner on the mainland, has fallen in love with Andy Sebastián, a young hood in the employ of Raul Sebastián, a local gangster. Silvia's father fears for her if their relationship continues. Carlos, a womaniser and casual cheat unsuited to the seriousness of his post, is so anxious to preserve the illusion of peace and quiet in his region that he gets Ramiro steaming drunk and allows Alida to convince him to issue a certificate of accidental death in the Pocho Martín case. Afterwards, Alida boasts to her sister that it was she who killed Pocho – María had been having sex with him. Raul Sebastián, who is having an affair with Alida, becomes jealous when he learns of how close Carlos and Alida used to be. He has his thugs beat up Carlos and orders him to stay away from the island. However, Carlos disobeys. Unbeknown to Carlos, María is in love with him, a situation exacerbated when he casually has sex with her. Meanwhile Andy reveals to Silvia that he is, in fact, the son of Raul Sebastián. One day, as she walks by the sea, Andy rapes María: he has been goaded by Rufo, an associate of Sebastián's, into 'trying out' another girl before marrying Silvia. Alida intervenes and shoots him in the head. Silvia discovers the truth and swears revenge. Wearing her wedding dress, armed with a gun, she heads for the island...*

Review: Upon seeing this intelligent and immaculately photographed character piece, the first thing that crosses the Franco veteran's mind is, 'Where the hell did *that* come from?' At this stage in his career Franco was running short of new ideas, and was frankly more inclined to take one of his old favourites for

another trot around the paddock. Then, out of the blue, he comes up with this moving and beautifully controlled melodrama. *Bahía blanca* is a sombre, mature piece of work about conflicting lives and loves in a remote coastal community, and along with *Juego sucio en Casablanca* it's probably as close as Franco ever came to a purely character-driven drama. Eroticism and horror are put aside for the duration, and it's actually a relief to discover that Franco can sustain a story without them. The emphasis is squarely on the relationships, with little or no exploitation element. For instance, a scene involving the rape of a mute girl by a criminal hoodlum is brief and un-voyeuristic, and whilst Eva León and Lina Romay go topless fairly often, it's just a natural facet of their uninhibited characters. After so much repetition in his recent films – some of it sublime, some of it substandard – *Bahía blanca* feels like something new for Jess Franco, and it's really a pity that the film was never released theatrically. Although the only version that survives as of this writing is a dreadful Spanish video release, with smeary colour, bad tracking and buzzy sound, I can say without fear of contradiction that the cinematography is gorgeous, with an emphasis on deep orange skies and lamp-lit wood tones. It really is a tragedy that this film is so hard to view.

For all that it's set in the real world, with layered, ambiguous characters, *Bahía blanca* is a strange tale, one that hints at the supernatural but chooses not to cross that particular threshold. The possibility of ghostly influence is raised by Don Oscar, a mystical character played by Franco himself, who pops up now and then to offer gloomy predictions of death and ruin. He claims that a nearby island, to which the menfolk of a local fishing village are drawn, is the home of a witch or mermaid out to destroy them. When Carlos Fernandez, a cheerfully inept policeman, goes to investigate, he finds two flesh-and-blood women, one of whom, Alida (*Mansion of the Living Dead*'s Eva León) he remembers from a whorehouse he used to visit. She now runs a bar for fishermen, and there's nothing supernatural or scary about her (except perhaps her wig, which she soon takes off). She lives on the island with her mute sister, María, and it's the warped relationship between the two of them which provides the crux of the drama.

There are no heroes, and even the villains are carefully nuanced. Corruption is a way of life, and the authorities, supposedly investigating the murder of a young villager, are easily dissuaded from following up their suspicions. The pathologist who accompanies Fernandez to the island is plied with rum by Alida, and after a veiled threat he agrees to write a fake coroner's report removing any hint of murder. Carlos, who's been parcelled off to this rural backwater by his superiors to get rid of him after a scandal, is shallow, vain and lazy; as a criminal investigator he simply doesn't measure up. He's far too busy amusing himself to change anything for the better. He's also a heel, an emotional lightweight who flees from his own tender feelings. After sex with Alida, he stays the night and the next day eats the breakfast she cooks for him. As she watches him eat Alida waxes lyrical about the difference it makes to have a man about the house, only for

Carlos to take advantage of her sister's sexual frustration and sneak off to have sex with her too. The script's treatment of this man is deft and deceptively casual: his failure as a man goes hand-in-hand with a smallness of character, and Franco is careful not to use a sledgehammer to crack such a measly nut. After Raul Sebastián warns Carlos to stay away from Alida, the latter makes a pathetic attempt to comply when the couple next meet. "I've never loved you. I never miss you. I don't desire you either," he claims, while Alida is astride him on the bed, "I don't enjoy your sex. I've never liked it." When she pulls away and climbs off him, he protests "What the hell are you doing? Get going! Come on!"; when she replies, "You just said you didn't like it, so what's the point?"; he pulls her back, saying, "Well, I don't dislike it either." Such is their relationship: a tired and vulnerable woman fighting off her cynicism and hoping to land a man, no matter how shallow; and a man whose ignorant disregard for women's feelings is a brittle protection against his own. ("Damn it, why am I so emotional? I'm such a fool," he moans, as he feels a flicker of what passes for love.)

Alida's response to Carlos's interest in María is as casual as Franco's critique of it. Confronting María, she is placatory and phlegmatic: "You are a naughty child. I can't leave you alone, can I? [...] Don't worry, I'm not mad about it, no no, I'm not mad at him either. That's life. I'd prefer you to have sex with him over anyone else. At least Carlos is clean, he smells like a real man." Alida's attitude to her vulnerable mute sister combines fierce protectiveness with abuse; she thinks nothing of mocking María's attraction to men, having murdered one of her sister's lovers when the two of them were living at a brothel. She exploits her association with the region's crime kingpin Raul, and accepts his murderous criminality with cynicism and detachment. The only decent folk in the story are the elderly León Maderos and his daughter Silvia; she wants to marry Andy, a local hood, while her father tries quietly to dissuade her, knowing she will defy him if he pushes too hard. Andy, meanwhile, is a handsome devil, but he's a fool with a dangerous void where his principles should be. What's more, as he reveals after making love with Silvia, he's not simply a hired hand for Raul Sebastián; he's the gangster's son. Even Raul Sebastián is drawn with light and shade; a killer, a career criminal, and casually anti-Semitic, he nonetheless genuinely loves his son.

It's interesting to speculate on the emotional tenor of this film, and the way in which it might reflect Franco's state of mind at the time it was made. Just as *Juego sucio en Casablanca* had told the story of a middle-aged writer burdened by a sense of futility and despair, so too does *Bahía blanca* feature a lead character (in this case a middle-aged prostitute) struggling beneath the weight of wasted years, lost opportunities and crushed expectations. The film begins with a ruminative voice-over from Alida as she looks out over the bay, watching the ships that used to stop at her little bar but which now sail past without stopping. Her words are fraught with weariness and fatalism: "Sometimes I come to the pier as though I am curious about the world about me, but to be honest there is nothing. I have no expectations as the boats sail past; not even they mean



Bride of vengeance: Silvia Maderos (Analia Ivars) stalks an island of sorrow in Franco's sombre and affecting Bahía blanca, a film about wasted years, lost opportunities and crushed expectations.

anything to me [...] The light from the torch has been dying for a long time. The torch no longer attracts the sailors, or the fishermen who used to come to my place to drink when they had finished their work. Most of their wages were spent on my love. I was willing enough. Now, I am on my own." Is it fanciful to imagine Franco has drawn upon his own feelings to write for Alida? After all, by the mid-1980s the ship had pretty much sailed for the kinds of film he preferred to make. The legalisation of hardcore pornography in Spain had rendered obsolete his preferred brand of 'S' certificate sado-erotica, and horror, his favourite film genre, was in recession around the world, as the powerhouse American mainstream dictated a shift from low budget fear and anxiety to big budget macho-dramatics and blockbuster techno-dominance. Franco, while always keen to feed the flame of his own fevered fantasies, never denied that he was a commercial director looking to please the popular audience. A parallel to the art of the hooker would not, I suspect, have troubled him ("I was willing enough"). What may have been troubling him, however, was the realisation that the circumstances which brought his fantasy life into synch with audience tastes ("Most of their wages were spent on my love") were breaking down. Worse still, this parting of the ways was gradually eroding his morale and motivation, leading to morbid backward glances ("The light from the torch has been dying for a long time"). Seen from this perspective, as a sort of confession, this opening soliloquy also confesses a failure to engage with the world ("Sometimes I come to the pier as though I am curious about the world about me, but to be honest there is nothing"), something that had never seemed to trouble Franco before. His films are almost entirely insular, subjective, summoning the world of an erotic dreamer, a mind-palace of fear and desire. Perhaps, as the blessed synchronisation between private fantasy and rude commerce began to fail, Franco had cast his gaze outwards, looking for inspiration, towards a different sort of cinema more engaged with reality? If so, Alida's remark indicates that the necessary allure simply wasn't there. Nevertheless, if Franco hasn't quite found the will to tell stories about the wider world, he has at least put aside the comfy slippers of genre pastiche in favour of sincere emotional drama. *Bahía blanca* and *Juego sucio en Casablanca* were probably made within a few months of each other, and I find them too similar in their digression from the Franco norm to be accidental or casual. Both films speak of sleepless nights worrying about the value of one's creativity and the fate of one's youthful dreams.

The central image, which recurs throughout the film, is of a small wooden boat, with a pattering outboard motor, traversing the waters between the mainland and Deer Island. Over and over again we see it steering towards the small wooden jetty of the island, or pulling into the slightly larger dock of the mainland village. Each time we see a different person standing at the prow, silhouetted against the ocean. The first such 'sailor' we see is Carlos Fernandez; then Raul Sebastián; then Andy Sebastián; and finally Silvia Maderos. In each case, the image uses geographical distance, the topological detachment of an island from the mainland, to imply the emotional gulfs and distances afflicting these characters:

Carlos, who can't admit to himself that he loves a woman; Raul, the father who masks his love for his son even when confronted with the boy's dead body; Andy, for whom the gulf between his self-image as a tough guy and his nervous inexperience with women leads to rape and punishment; and finally Silvia, who suffers the loss of her lover and the death of her dreams of happiness. Standing upright, at the prow of the boat, each of them in turn looking over the water, they all cut lonely, rather pathetic figures, assuming their postures of proud individualism as their impotent lives glide slowly into calamity. It's a striking image too because it adds something new to the lexicon of symbolism in Franco's treatment of the sea: in his fantastical films, the sea represents a boundary, a liminal space between one realm and another, like the hypnagogic state between wakefulness and sleep, and in the sex-and-horror pictures it's an erotic symbol, hovering at the brink of pleasure/dissolution. In *Bahía blanca* the sea becomes the medium of detachment, of separation, across which characters struggle to build relationships. Finally, this visual scheme leads to one of Franco's stone-cold classic images: a woman in a bridal dress, holding a rifle, standing erect in a small boat as it crosses the bay, an icon of vengeance painted in colours of hopelessness and loss.

Bahía blanca isn't perfect: it still has Franco's perennial pacing problems, it was obviously assembled quickly, and there are some puzzling ellipses here and there which suggest either missing footage or a failure to polish the script (Alida's threat to the pathologist comes out of nowhere; the unexplained arrival of a gang of sailors is puzzling after Alida has stated that ships don't come any more; the fates of Silvia and Carlos are left unclear). But these failings are mere grains of sand in the flowing water of the film's achievements. For a film like this to emerge when Franco was at such a low ebb is close to miraculous. As ever, one's Franco mileage may vary, but for anyone attuned to his special talents *Bahía blanca* is a film to cherish.

Franco on screen: Franco plays the village doom-monger with quiet dignity, in contrast to the loopy apocalyptic charlatan he played in 1973's *Kiss Me Killer*; he also dubs Juan Soler's character, the pathologist Ramiro Sarmento. Lina Romay dubs Analía Ivars' character, Silvia Leon.

Music: Though used quite heavily, some might say relentlessly, Julián Sacristán's moody and emotional theme tune will resonate in your mind for days afterwards; it is so wedded to the film that it's impossible to say where the power of the music ends and the power of the drama begins, which is great scoring. Sacristán had been a prolific recording artist in the 1960s, when he fronted two groups playing British-influenced beat pop and American-style rock'n'roll: Los Flaps (with whom he recorded between 1962 and 1965) and Los Flecós (1965-1966). He was lead guitarist in both these bands, playing the Fender Stratocaster with a sound that bore the unmistakable influence of Hank Marvin of The Shadows. Sacristán remains active in music to the present day, and as a long-time resident of Alicante has performed regular concerts, with reformed versions of his old bands, at the Castillo de Santa Barbara, i.e.

the prison in *99 Women* (1968), the castle in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1971), and the eponymous dwelling in *Revenge in the House of Usher* (1983).

Locations: Lo Pagan, in the province of Murcia. The rocks in *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle*, upon which Emmanuelle was raped, reappear here as the private coastal hideaway where Alida and María sunbathe together.

Connections: Like *Al otro lado del espejo* (1973), the story climaxes with a young woman, dressed in a wedding gown, overwhelmed by a personal tragedy ... The relationship between Lina Romay's traumatised mute María and Eva León's sexually voracious Alida recalls a similar dynamic in *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973), in which Romay played the sexually active sister. Both films climax with the mute character's suicide after a sister's betrayal (in *The Hot Nights of Linda* it's sexual betrayal, in *Bahía blanca* it's emotional) ... According to Franco scholar Robert Monell, *Bahía blanca* was conceived by Franco as a conscious homage to such classic Westerns as Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar*.

VOCES DE MUERTE

translation: *Voices of Death*

UNRELEASED

Spain, 1984

Alternative title

Finestrat (shooting title)

Production companies

Manacoa Films

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date 1984

Intended theatrical running time

Spain 87m (reported in official Spanish records)

director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**, adapted from **Edgar Wallace's** play *The Case of the Frightened Lady*. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. editor: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel White**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Ricardo Palacios**. **Carmen Carrión**. **Eva León**. **Lina Romay**. **Antonio Mayans**. **Trino Trives**. **José Llamas**.

Production notes: According to Franco this is a finished film, complete with music and titles, which due to the collapse of his relationship with Golden Films went unreleased. (It must have got pretty close to a release because details were logged for the film with the Spanish authorities.) It was based on Edgar Wallace's *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (1932), a tale that had already been filmed four times: as *The Frightened Lady* (T. Hayes Hunter, 1932), as *Quelqu'un a tué* (Jack Forrester, 1933), as *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (George King, 1940) and as *Das Indische Tuch* aka *The Indian Scarf* (Alfred Vohrer, 1963), the latter one of the slew of Wallace adaptations made by Rialto Films in Germany in the 1960s. In addition it was dramatised twice by the BBC, once in 1938 and again in 1983. One wishes that Franco's version could be added to this shelf full of adaptations!

The plot of the book concerns the wealthy Lebanon family, who live in the splendid stately home of Mark's Priory. Lady Lebanon tells her son, Lord William Lebanon, that he must marry his cousin, Isla Crane, to continue the family line. However, William does not wish to marry Isla, and she in turn has fallen in love with Richard Ferraby, an architect who has come to the Priory to draw up plans for renovation. Two sinister butlers and the family physician, the latter of whom has some sort of hold over Lady Lebanon, add to a sense of foreboding and mystery. When the chauffeur is found murdered, suspicion falls first upon the gamekeeper and then on the village doctor – until he too is found murdered in identical fashion. A Franco film drawn from such a story could have yielded something along the lines of 1973's *Night of the Skull*; although production papers recently uncovered by Francesco Cesari from the Spanish film archives suggest that it was a remake of *A Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1971)! Personally I suspect that it may also have resembled *Sola ante el terror*, with which it shares some plot similarities and a central location, La Muralla Roja.

LAS ÚLTIMAS DE FILIPINAS

(SP theatrical title) *Last of the Philippine Women*

Spain, 1984

Production company

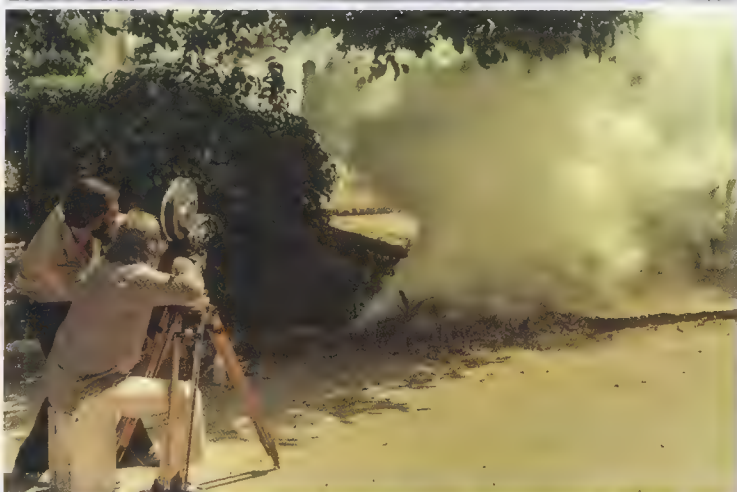
Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Santiago Moncada, P.C. (Spain)

Theatrical distributor

Bellparaiso S.A. *

* Although picked up for distribution by Bellparaiso, *Las últimas de Filipinas* appears not to have been released theatrically. I can find no record of a release in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Murcia or Cartagena. If it played elsewhere, evidence is currently unavailable.



Las últimas de Filipinas.

These photographs, provided by Juan Soler Cózar, give us a fascinating window into an extremely obscure backwater of the Franco filmography. *Las últimas de Filipinas* was never released in cinemas, and being bereft of sex and violence it's unlikely to turn up on Blu-ray any time soon.

TOP LEFT: Juana de la Morena applies make-up to Juan Soler in preparation for his dream/flashback scene as Maria Fernanda (Helen Garret)'s father. Morena also played the mother in this sequence. TOP RIGHT: Soler clowns for the camera with Lina Romay (seated). Lina is wearing the striped socks that she will sport throughout this film, in which she plays a stuffy Victorian governess to Maria and little Flavia (Flavia Mayans). Franco is in the background talking to the two extras who play the Fernanda family servants.

MIDDLE LEFT & RIGHT: Franco shoots the battle scene: judging by his position and posture it seems that Ángel Ordiales is the focus puller for these shots.

BOTTOM LEFT: Romay in full governess apparel, waiting as Franco instructs the extras for the forthcoming battle scene.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Camera assistant Ordiales (bearded, facing camera) and Helen Garret (holding bag) wait for Franco to start shooting.

Timeline

Shooting date July 1984

Proposed theatrical running time

Spain 90m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'Valfer' PAL VHS 88m03s

director: **Jess Franco** [as Jesus Franco]. writer: **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khune']. adaptation and dialogue: **Santiago Moncada**. director of photography: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. clothes supplier: **Peris**. special effects: **Bron Chú**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'R.M. Almirall']. music: **Monia Liter**. music publisher: **Harmony** (Madrid). camera and lighting equipment: **M. Mateos**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Fujicolor. *Uncredited*: co-producer: **Jess Franco**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Cecilia Muro). **Flavia Mayans** [as 'Flavia Hervas'] (Flavia). **Helen Garret** (Maria Fernanda). **José Moreno** (Pepe, old island-dweller). **José Llamas** (Malou, a fisherman). **José Miguel García Marfa** (Mario, Caucasian pirate).

Synopsis: *The Philippines, 1896, near the end of the Spanish-American war: "Five minutes before Spanish rule went to hell". Cecilia Muro is the governess of two girls, Flavia (10) and Maria Fernanda (16), who have been orphaned during the US attack. Fleeing armed conflict in the Philippines they embark on a ship, only for a bomb attack to leave them washed up on a tropical shoreline. Cecilia, à la Robinson Crusoe, does her best to recreate a civilised environment for herself and the girls, including teaching history and literature. Maria Fernanda finds love in the arms of Malou, a handsome young fisherman, while Flavia enjoys the company of a friendly chimpanzee. However, after someone steals their clothes while they're bathing, the women realise that they're not alone on the island. Eventually a man shows up: he's an old drunkard, a Mexican named Pepe who was banned years earlier from a pirate ship and lives in a cave. Cecilia realises that if she too is to find love with a man, it must be with him. Resolving to make the best of a bad lot, she trims his scruffy beard and marches him at gunpoint to a rockpool where she forces him to bathe. The two hit it off and perform a marriage ceremony (instead of a Bible, Pepe reads excerpts from Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, the only book Cecilia carried to the island), after which the old man reveals that he has a cache of jewels stashed in a cave, along with a skeleton he calls Oscar, an old friend from his lonely days on the island. While the couple are busy with their 'honeymoon', a party of Asian pirates arrive in a boat. After killing a woman they've brought with them, they capture Maria Fernanda and her lover. Fortunately Flavia has found a cache of explosives in the old man's cave and uses them to decimate the invaders. The survivors flee the island, and all ends happily ever after...*

Production notes: The writer and critic Carlos Aguilar, who worked with Franco for a while as assistant director, recalls that the three films he was involved in were shot more or less back-to-back: *Las últimas de Filipinas* was the first, swiftly followed by *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido* and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte...*

Review: With a brazen chutzpah that can only raise a smile, Jess Franco kicks off this pile of nonsense by staging the Philippine Revolution in three minutes, with a couple of smoke bombs and a handful of extras running around. He follows this with the sinking of a ship, ostensibly by cannon fire, conveyed by means of a single scream and a zip-pan through a cloud of smoke. Cut to the main cast washed up on a deserted shore, and there you have it: possibly the most economical wartime adventure sequence ever committed to celluloid! The rest of the film is a rather tedious tropical island adventure yarn, in which Lina Romay's starchy governess learns to loosen up and enjoy herself with a wily old shipwrecked pirate, while her two young charges throw themselves into the castaway life with Disneyesque gusto.

It's difficult to imagine who would have paid for a cinema ticket in 1985 to see this bargain-bin amalgam of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Blue Lagoon*, as Franco gets his concept of a target audience hopelessly muddled. There's lots of near-nudity for a sexploitation audience, with Helen Garret revealing her shapely breasts and walking around in a home-made thong, but the story itself is aimed at children, with little Flavia Mayans saving the day, accompanied by a cute chimpanzee. Full marks to Spanish character actor José Moreno for his eccentric island-dweller, first mistaken for some sort of madman or mutant hominid; his performance gives the story what little spice there is. Apart from the fleeting menace provided by a gang of Asian interlopers, who tie up Fernanda and her young lover and threaten them with a whipping, there's little here to quicken the pulse. Children would be monumentally bored by the static set-ups and leaden pacing, while for adult audiences the only thrill is the occasional opportunity to watch Garret's breasts and partially exposed ass cheeks bouncing around the screen. Romay goes semi-nude too, but if you're keen to see her in the buff there are far better places to look. The film is dedicated "to all shipwrecked Spaniards, irrespective of class, age or regional origin". Let's hope they're insomniacs too, as Spanish TV station TVE1 gave *Las últimas de Filipinas* its first ever public screening in May 1997 – at four in the morning!

Cast and crew: José Moreno (1933-2007) had previously appeared in 1957's Juan de Orduña's musical *El último cuplé* (the film which inspired Franco's *La reina del Tabarín*), Duccio Tessari's bandit adventure *¡Viva la muerte... tua!* (1971), Juan Buñuel's vampire art-odddity *Leonor* in 1975, and the ultra-obscure Paul Naschy serial killer drama *El huerto del Francés* (1978).

Music: The film's orchestral music is drawn from the work of prolific Ukrainian-born composer Monia Liter (1906-1988), who first found fame working with Al Bowlly in the 1920s and 30s. He joined the BBC in 1941 as a pianist, conductor and arranger,

but after ten years left to concentrate on composing and concert work. He was the solo pianist on George Melachrino's recording of Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' (on HMV), and as a member of the Mantovani Orchestra he recorded Clive Richardson's 'London Fantasia' and Hubert Bath's 'Cornish Rhapsody'. He also composed many tracks for a series of library music albums by The New Concert Orchestra (from the UK's Boosey & Hawkes company), including tracks on *Moods Impressions Fantasies* (1957). His film credits include *Fire Maidens from Outer Space* (1956), *Kill Me Tomorrow* (1957), *Death Drums Along the River* (1963) and *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (1971), but in each case the music was taken from one of his pre-existing library albums.

Locations: Alicante, El Algar and Altea (source: Antonio Mayans). Some sources add the Canary Islands, but Antonio Mayans is unconvinced: "*Maybe a single shot.*"

Connections: The title is a play on words, feminising the 1945 Spanish film *Los últimos de Filipinas*. Made during General Franco's reign, the film depicts, in heroic terms, the ruling Spanish military's battle against native insurrection in the Philippines during the Spanish-American war of 1898 ... *Las últimas de Filipinas* is the third Franco film to feature an eroticised desert island scenario: the others are 1972's *Sexy Darlings* (whose German title translates as *Robinson and his Wild Slaves*) and 1981's *El lago de las virgenes*. Similar action adventure motifs are also marshalled in Franco's *Un capitán de quince años* (1972), a cut-price version of which this movie occasionally resembles.

VIAJE A BANGKOK, ATAÚD INCLUIDO

(SP theatrical title) *Trip to Bangkok, coffin included*

Spain, 1984

depósito legal no: M-3.431-1985

Alternative titles

Viaje a Bangkok (depósito legal registration title)

Production companies

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Zafiro Films Produccion S.A.

Theatrical distributor

Heraldo Films S.A. [SMC]

Orion Films International (poster)

Timeline

Shooting date	circa July	1984
Depósito legal number	25 January	1985
Madrid	30 April	1987

Theatrical running time

Spain

92m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'Filmax' PAL VHS

87m50s

writer/director: **Jess Franco**, based on a novel by **Edgar Wallace**. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa Ma. Almirall']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistants: **Ángel Ordiales** & **Enrique Díaz**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'José Antonio Mayans']. make-up: **Juana de la Morena**. dubbing director: **Víctor Ágramunt**. music: **Denis Farnon**. music publisher: **Harmon**. music recording: **Sintonia**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *Uncredited:* co-producer: **Jess Franco**. 1st. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Howard Vernon** (Colonel Daniel J. Blimp). **Helen Garret** (Marion Wentworth). **José Llamas** (Agent Philip Sanders). **Trino Trives** (Professor Tao). **Ana Espejo** (Rita, Tao's daughter, aka Madame Rita, a stripper). **Christian Bork** (Jonathan Keats). **Rafael Corés** [as 'Rafael Cores'] (Peter Welbeck, Sanders' boss). **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Juan Cozar'] (Byron Longwood aka 'Charles Dickens', the UK Consul in Bangkok). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'José Miguel García'] (nude 'Amok' in Tao's sanctum). **Oscar San Juan**. *Uncredited:* **Ángel Ordiales** (Mr. Karame, jeweller). **Juana de la Morena** (Doctor Zoe Karlsen). **Carlos Aguilar** (bellboy at Blimp's hotel). **Jess Franco** (Bangkok hotel receptionist). **Antonio Mayans** (President of the United Nations). **Julia Terán**. **Eugenia Farach** (airline receptionist).

Synopsis: Colonel Daniel J. Blimp of the British Secret Service arrives in Singapore to investigate the assassination of the British ambassador, Sir Thomas Wentworth, by a man who appears hypnotised. The killer's skin is dark, although he is in fact Caucasian. He is also blind since birth. With the help of a cheerful Singaporean taxi driver who attaches himself to the visitor, Blimp visits a Singapore jeweller's store serving as a front for the Secret Service. There he makes contact with Jonathan Keats, an undercover agent. After discussing the case with him, he visits the killer in hospital. There he is informed that the dark pigmentation of the man's skin is the result of a strange mutation. Meanwhile, at the British embassy in Bangkok, Peter Welbeck briefs a second agent, Philip Sanders, and sends him to assist Blimp in his investigations. Arriving early for a rendezvous with Keats at a bar in Singapore, Blimp meets a young woman called Marion, who makes small talk and introduces herself as a journalist. When Wentworth arrives, the two men discuss the Wentworth case for a while until Blimp excuses himself to fetch a package of evidence to be sent to London. As soon as he leaves the room, Marion sits with Keats: she is Wentworth's daughter, and she and Keats are lovers. They both agree that Blimp must not find out about their relationship. Unbeknownst to them, Blimp has left a miniature tape recorder hidden in his tobacco pouch on

the table, which he retrieves when he returns. Meanwhile, in Bangkok a visiting nobleman is murdered in broad daylight by another brainwashed blind assassin. When Blimp listens to his covert recording, he hears Keats tell Marion that he has been summoned to Bangkok by someone called 'The Professor', after which he will return and meet Marion at the Roxy Bar. Blimp turns up at their rendezvous to discover that the Roxy Bar is a brothel. He confronts Keats and Marion, and demands to know about the Professor. Keats only has time to give his name – Professor Tao – before he's killed by a blow-dart. Using a smoke bomb, Blimp saves himself and Marion. He learns from her that Tao is the head of a mystic sect: she and Keats were disciples. Taking Marion into his custody, Blimp heads back to the jeweller's store to use Keats's radio link to HQ. Speaking to Sanders, he learns that Welbeck has just been murdered by someone lying in wait when he went to view the corpse of the murdered nobleman. Meanwhile, Marion escapes from Blimp's custody by seducing the cab driver. Blimp and Sanders track her down, but she and Blimp are then kidnapped by Tao's men. Tao (who is also blind since birth) tells Blimp that as a boy he fell into a cave where strange rocks exerted a supersensory influence upon his mind. In a terrible vision he saw a future Earth devoid of life after an atomic catastrophe. His plan therefore is to kill a selected number of leading politicians, such as the secretary of the United Nations, to prevent nuclear armageddon and establish a new world order. With Sanders' help, Blimp escapes. They save Marion and stop Tao's plans just in time.

Review: Although it lacks the dynamic action sequences that would normally accompany this kind of espionage story, *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido* is a witty and likable tale that breezes along on the strength of its delightful central performances and some amusingly salty dialogue. The epitome of a 'Sunday afternoon film', the sort of thing one might enjoy watching on TV after a large lunch, it's as brisk and effervescent as a white wine spritzer; the polar opposite of something like Franco's then-recent crime tale *La chica de los labios rojos*, which felt like the celluloid equivalent of a hang-over. That's not to say *Viaje a Bangkok* is exactly throbbing with excitement: rather typically for Franco, it lacks the tension that would justify calling it a thriller. What it does have is a lightness of touch and a corresponding mood of confidence. The film is like a good mood caught on film: leading man Howard Vernon is clearly having a ball, giving a spirited performance as a crusty old secret agent called Colonel Blimp who finds himself working alongside young gun Philip Sanders. The latter role, meanwhile, is played with brio and panache by Franco regular José Llamas, who has never looked more handsome. "Philip Sanders, but you can call me Phil," says the younger man when they first meet. "I'm Colonel Daniel J. Blimp, but you can call me Colonel Blimp," snaps the other. Blimp is portrayed initially as a cantankerous old misanthrope with an underlying slyness – W.C. Fields crossed with Columbo. When Sanders tries to bond by showing Blimp a photograph of his family, he waves it aside with disdain: "Can't stand children, not even in photos." Sanders, however, is no fool. He sees through the older man's defences and treats his cutting remarks lightly, after which

the two of them get along just fine. By the end of the film they have a camaraderie based on mutual respect. This makes it a rare beast in the Franco canon; a story in which male friendship is seen as positive and valuable.

Snappy dialogue is not usually Franco's forté, but *Viaje a Bangkok* draws much comic banter from the wellspring of Blimp's national character. "I'm Irish, like all talented Brits: Bernard Shaw, Joyce, Priestley..." he says to a young barman in Singapore. (Two out of three for accuracy, Jess: J.B. Priestley was a Yorkshireman.) When Sanders says, "I'm from Wales," Blimp smirks, "Finally we have something in common. We can speak badly of the English!" If Sanders is Welsh, he's keeping his accent very well hidden, not to mention his nomenclative roots. But let's not quibble over details; after all, he's probably lying. What really matters is the playful tone, which Franco adeptly maintains without sliding into the silliness that afflicted *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espía?* a few months earlier. There's enough sparkle here to suggest that Franco was really enjoying himself while writing the script, and this enlivens the whole affair, making it one of the most quotable films in his oeuvre.

The film is ably decorated with situation comedy too. For instance, Blimp frequently gets the edge on people by concealing a tiny tape recorder in his ever-present packet of pipe tobacco, which he 'absent-mindedly' leaves behind, knowing that others will talk about him after he's gone. A minute later he returns to retrieve the tobacco, while joking about his terrible memory. Everyone falls for this routine because he's an old man, and since he's constantly filling his pipe with tobacco, the packet becomes invisible. Vernon plays these scenes perfectly, letting us see his secret delight at foxing those who underestimate him. Then, in a lovely comic touch, after sending a secret radio message, Blimp really does forget his tobacco, before acknowledging the slip with a wry shake of the head. José Llamas gets some decent material as well, whether cheekily posing as a 'sinner' in need of salvation, jumping a queue by lifting a man bodily out of the way, chair and all, or ejecting out of a phone cubicle a man arguing with his wife, then picking up the receiver and saying, "He left with a blonde."

Gratifyingly eccentric in its later stages, *Viaje a Bangkok* presents us with an intriguing metaphysical twist. The film's supervillain, Master Tao, is a reclusive religious guru, and in the normal spy-movie run of things we would expect that he's been cynically conning his followers. In fact it's more interesting than that. Master Tao has genuine psychic powers; he's able to read minds and expose the precise nature of a person's thoughts. His motivation for the killings is fascinating: instead of seeking to rule the world, or amass personal wealth, he's acting to save the planet. As a boy, he had a vision of the world being destroyed by "Atomic wars, disasters created by selfishness, the ridiculous ambition of man [...] nature will die [...] trees will turn to stone, and the sea to quagmire." His plan to murder prominent world leaders is designed to prevent this cataclysm. Interestingly, Tao's premonition of global catastrophe is itself prefigured by an earlier monologue from Blimp which has all the hallmarks of a directorial statement: "The damned influence of



Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido
and Gentes del Rio

FACING PAGE

TOP, AND BOTTOM RIGHT:
Howard Vernon in high spirits preparing for
his bathroom scene in *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido*, with make-up woman Juana de la
Morena adding bubblebath foam.

BOTTOM LEFT:
While Franco had Vernon available,
he took the opportunity to shoot scenes for
Gentes del Rio, a film which stalled several
times before being abandoned unfinished. It's
unclear whether this photograph shows Vernon
in character, or relaxing between takes.

THIS PAGE

Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido: Franco films
the scene in which Colonel Blimp (Vernon)
and Marion Wentworth (Helen Garret) have
been captured by Dr. Tao's followers.
Ángel Ordiales assists.



western tourism, especially in warm countries, has turned cities into places without personality. They are all the same. Sometimes you see remnants of old and pure civilisations, but soon those damned skyscrapers stick out, devouring everything in the name of progress.” Franco underscores the irony of Blimp saying this by having Sanders tartly observe that this is precisely what Englishmen did to their colonies, to which Blimp replies, “You’re not offending me at all. I’m Irish and I share your view.”

But the point remains; if Blimp, a servant of the British Empire, can see this, how much more urgent is the perspective of Tao, a genuine visionary? Nothing that we see or hear contradicts Tao’s assertions, or his motives. We are left to assume that he’s telling the truth, or at least believes what he is saying, which makes the ending – in which Sanders and Blimp save the President of the United Nations – ambiguous to say the least. Have the heroes prevented a lunatic from assassinating random politicians? Or have they just consigned the whole planet to nuclear annihilation? We are left to wonder, and perhaps even to hope that Tao will start afresh: “*I will be gone for some time, but don’t worry, we’ll see each other again,*” he writes, channelling Fu Manchu in a parting note to Blimp, “*Maybe earlier than you think.*”

On the downside – unsurprisingly, given Franco’s typically hasty methods – there are several loose threads to this yarn. The cheery Singaporean taxi driver who latches onto Blimp is featured prominently, but as comic relief he’s poorly written, and in narrative terms his inclusion is never really justified. Franco’s slapdash approach to the character is typified by the fact that we never even learn his name. Then there’s the fact that several scenes which ought to have been shown onscreen are merely alluded to in the dialogue, such as Peter Welbeck’s murder and the abduction of Marion by Tao’s followers. The disciples played by Juan Soler and Ana Espejo appear to be operating independently of Tao, and their inclusion as a subplot late in the day suggests that they are going to do something significant; instead their storyline peters out and we are left none the wiser. Tao’s fascinating story about his childhood fall into a cave, thus awakening his precognitive abilities, is crying out for an evocative flashback. Instead the story is simply murmured by actor Trino Trives, who must not only tell it lying down but also with a cloth laid over his eyes! The dramatic possibilities are rather thrown away; Tao is supposed to be a mesmerising presence, rather like Cagliostro in Franco’s delirious cine-fumetti *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), so it seems the height of perversity to deprive him of his eyes, the organs by which mesmerism is usually achieved! Even though blindness is apparently a prerequisite of the visionary state Tao describes, much could still have been made of the actor’s staring orbs, conventionally sightless but uncannily blessed with visions of the future. This, I think, is the main deficiency of Franco’s haste as a director: his rapid production rate means that glaringly obvious dramatic or cinematic potential is squandered. Dramatic scenarios fly past without being fully exploited, and narratively satisfying outcomes are overlooked. These deficiencies are not the result of a lack of imagination; if Franco had cared to sweat

the script a little longer he was more than sharp enough to have spotted these potential sources of power and corrected his errors and non-sequiturs. Another pervasive problem, one which had dogged Franco all the way back to his crime thrillers of the early 1960s, is a distinct lack of urgency in the pacing. For instance, in a long exchange we see Sanders being briefed by Welbeck, played by grizzled Paella-Western veteran Rafael Corés. We cut to Blimp’s investigations in Singapore, then return to Sanders and Welbeck, this time in an extended long shot, for the pouring of cups of tea and yet more yacking. ‘Briefing an operative’ is hardly the sort of thing that needs to be dragged out so much; the two scenes should really have been compressed into one. This is typical of the film overall; what’s needed is a ‘cut to the chase’ approach, but there is no chase to cut to. There simply isn’t enough money to tell an action adventure story, so the payoff is all in the dialogue. Fortunately, if you can accept an adventure film without action scenes or car chases, *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido* is well worth a look. In fact I’d go so far as to say that it’s one of the most sheerly enjoyable romps of Franco’s later career.

Franco on screen: Franco takes a minor role as a hotel manager who tips off Sanders about the mysterious ‘Charles Dickens’.

Cast and crew: The unnamed though heavily featured actor playing the Singapore cab driver also played Kumon in *En busca del dragón dorado* (1982). According to Antonio Mayans he ran a martial arts club in Benidorm, probably the same one seen in this film and *La esclava blanca* (1985).

Music: The music, though anachronistic, is pleasingly vigorous, with some very 1960s horn arrangements apparently drawn from the extensive film library music catalogue of Dennis Farnon, a Canadian composer perhaps best known for scoring the *Mister Magoo* cartoons.

Locations: Ersatz Orientalism seems to be Franco’s default position when he reaches for the exotic: see *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, *En busca del dragón dorado*, *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong*, sundry sitar-drenched titles from the Erwin Dietrich period, and the later *Esclavas del crimen*. For much of the time in this film he relies on a succession of Spanish karate clubs and Chinese restaurant interiors, although some location material was obtained by Juan Soler in Thailand (see next entry, *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*). For most of the time, Las Palmas stands in for Bangkok, with the production once again making use of the Hotel Santa Catalina, as seen in numerous Canary Islands location shoots since *Ópalo de fuego* (1978). The attack on the U.N. President takes place at a shopping centre arcade in Benidorm, previously seen in *Los blues de la calle Pop* (1982).

Connections: The story is a partial reworking of Franco’s *Attack of the Robots*, with its brainwashed assassins, Caucasians with darkened skin, controlled long distance by an evil mastermind ... Onscreen credits allege that the story is based on characters created by Edgar Wallace, but apart from the use of the English name ‘Sanders’ (totally out of context with Wallace’s *Sanders of the River*) I’m unable to see a genuine connection ... Among the character



ORION FILMS
 HOWARD VERNON - KATJA BIENERT - J. LLAMAS
 HELENA GARRET - CHRISTIAN BORCK
**VIAJE A BANGKOK,
 ATAÚD INCLUIDO**
 Director: JESUS FRANCO
 Basada en la novela de Edgar Wallace



TOP: Blimp (Howard Vernon) observes the process by which Professor Tao creates a human robot (José Miguel García Marfa).
 BOTTOM LEFT: Sanders is attacked by one of Tao's men. BOTTOM RIGHT: Franco films a scene in *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido*. Ángel Ordiales assists.



from *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido*: TOP LEFT: Colonel Daniel J. Blimp (Howard Vernon) and girl-in-trouble Marion (Helen Garret). TOP RIGHT: Blimp's ever-ready Singapore hustler/handyman (actor unknown). MIDDLE: Colonel Blimp radios his findings to London. BOTTOM LEFT: A concussed Blimp learns to rely on young upstart Agent Philip Sanders (José Llamas). BOTTOM RIGHT, from *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*: Aminia (Lina Romay), a pirate, gets the better of playboy Malko (Antonio Mayans).

names decorating the script is 'Colonel Blimp' (referencing, of course, Michael Powell's 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*). Blimp's full name is Daniel J. Blimp, an in-joke reference to Franco's favourite composer and personal friend Daniel J. White, upon whose old world demeanour and frequent pipe-smoking Vernon would seem to have based his performance ... In another in-joke, the Secret Service bigwig who sends Sanders into the fray is called 'Peter Welbeck', the pen-name of Franco's old friend and producer in the late 1960s, Harry Alan Towers ... Blimp's code name when sending reports via radio is Victor Massé, in reality a 19th century French opera composer best known for *Galathée* (1852) and *Les noces de Jeannette* (1853) ... Juan Soler plays Byron Longwood, aka 'Charles Dickens', who, as you may know, wrote a few books ... Keats explains to Blimp that the jewellers' shop is not the permanent HQ for his organisation; instead he likes to keep changing it. "*Here today, a printing house tomorrow, a sex shop the next day.*" This recalls the deliberately absurd strategy employed by 'Mother' (Patrick Newell) in the 1968-1969 series of the British TV series *The Avengers*, a show which Franco had already referenced several times in his 'Red Lips' films of the 1960s ... Carlos Aguilar, author of *Jess Franco, El Sexo del Horror*, plays the receptionist at Blimp's run-down Bangkok hotel ... One hesitates to cite the villain's name, 'Tao', as a 'connection': in Chinese the word means 'path' or 'way', and in Eastern philosophy it signifies primordial essence or the fundamental nature of the universe. Franco uses it as a signifier of Oriental mysticism, with all the subtlety of a Miss Piggy karate chop; one looks forward to the corresponding Chinese film featuring an Israeli villain called Professor Holy Ghost ... Tao speaks of steering the minds of his slaves with his 'magnetism', recalling the 'magnetic rays' of Cagliostro in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* ... Blimp is gassed unconscious in the back of a limousine by means of a hosepipe operated by the driver, a call back to *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* (1971) ... The banter between Sanders and Blimp is a window into Franco's own character; as I discovered when I met him, Franco loved to crack jokes at the expense of one's nationality!

BANGKOK, CITA CON LA MUERTE

(SP theatrical title) *Bangkok, Appointment with Death*

Spain, 1984

depósito legal no: unknown

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Theatrical distributor

Laurenfilm, S.A. [SMC]

Timeline

Shooting date	circa July/August	1984
Spanish TV screening (TV3)	05 August	1992

Intended theatrical running time

Spain	87m
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Running time (converted)

SP PAL TV transmission	87m04s
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Although the Spanish Ministry of Culture indicates that the film was distributed theatrically by Laurenfilm, and quotes audience figures of 15,067, I can find no record of a theatrical release in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Murcia or Cartagena. Unreleased outside Spain.

writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Cliffor Brawm']. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. costumes: **Peris**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. lights: **Mateos**. transport: **Mundus**. laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Fujicolor. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. 2nd unit director/camera operator: **Juan Soler Cózar**. editor: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**.

Cast: **José Llamas** (Riao Carrara). **Helen Garret** (Marta, Flanagan's daughter). **Eduardo Fajardo** (Flanagan). **Christian Bork** [as 'Bork Gordon'] (Panama Joe). **Lina Romay** (Aminia). **Antonio Mayans** (Malko, a playboy). **Albino Graziani** (Spencer, man at poolside bar). **Maximiliano Quiroga**. **Rafael Cayetano** [as 'Ramon Garci'] (Malko's henchman). **Carlos Aguilar** (Flanagan's Chinese servant).

Synopsis: *During a pleasure cruise, Marta Flanagan, daughter of a famous billionaire, is kidnapped by Siamese pirates led by Aminia and her husband Akuto. Marta's boyfriend Riao Carrara, the son of a powerful industrialist, is made to jump overboard, but survives and begins the search for his lover. The pirates were hired by Malko, a playboy drug dealer, who has persuaded them that it was an unimportant kidnapping. When Malko and his servant Ping Pong meet the pirates, Aminia turns against him and she keeps her hostage. Riao hires a private eye, Spencer, to track Marta's kidnappers, and so does Flanagan, who offers private detective Panama Joe a huge reward to find and bring back Marta by any means necessary. In Bangkok, Riao meets Aminia and Akuto, who negotiate the release of their hostage directly, demanding a twenty million dollar ransom. Panama Joe spies on Riao, and through him he traces Aminia's hideout. Meanwhile Flanagan has arrived in Bangkok too, but his encounter with Panama Joe is revealed to the pirates by an Oriental servant. After Riao has paid the ransom, Malko and his servant show up, beat Akuto to death and take Marta with them, while Aminia escapes with*

the ransom cheque. She then offers Panama Joe an alliance; get Marta back from Malko and then share the ransom. Aminia lures Malko into a trap at her hair salon, promising to share the ransom money. She then informs Panama Joe about the trap, but Ping Pong sees them together and alerts Malko. However, soon after he is killed by Panama Joe. Malko and a drugged Marta show up at Aminia's place. Malko kills the pirates. When Riao shows up, he defies Malko's men, but he too is dispatched by Malko, who gets his comeuppance from Panama Joe. The detective brings back Marta to her father (whom he unmasks as the mastermind behind Marta's kidnapping) and keeps Riao's check for himself.

Production notes: It comes as quite a shock to realise that this very obscure low budget production for Golden Films involved a shooting period in the Far East! As had happened on *Linda* (1981) when Franco sent a 'second-unit' of Lina Romay and Juan Soler to pick up shots on the island of Madeira, Soler was once again despatched abroad, this time operating solo and flying considerably further afield. He explains, "Although I do not remember this film well, I recognise some takes that I myself made in Bangkok and Pattaya. It's possible that other shots of Bangkok were used in *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido*. After the Spanish filming was completed, I embarked alone on a plane from Madrid, heading for Bangkok with a 300-meter can of film in the suitcase and very little money. No prior contact had been made with a producer there, nor with anyone else. After twenty-four hours of travel, I arrived at the hotel (tourist package) and looking through the Yellow Pages I found some producers. I went to visit them in a tuk-tuk [a motorised rickshaw] and found one from whom I rented an Arriflex of the same format that we had used for shooting in Spain, plus an assistant, producer, driver and van. Then I started shooting support footage for the film(s). The Thai team considered me a Martian and never understood what I was doing. When I asked for exotic locales, I was asked what was exotic for me. I understand that for us, a beach with turquoise blue waters and coconut trees is very unique; for them, exoticism can be a Murcian landscape. They also did not understand why I insisted on eating the same spicy foods as they did, impassively, without ever showing tears or gasping for breath. I shot in Bangkok and Pattaya. The money was not enough, and I went through great inconvenience, eventually calling reverse charge to Antonio Mayans (our head of production) to send me more. Of course at that time there were no cell phones or internet. Antonio saved me at the last minute with a transfer of some money. Needless to say, the production method by which we lived was quite crazy and absurd (Golden, Plata, JE, Manacoa, etc., etc.). But all of this made our work so exciting and fun. Priceless."¹

Review: Sadly the only surviving copy of this companion-piece to *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido* is a truly atrocious bootleg taken from Spanish TV, which blurs the audio and turns the faces of the actors into abstract smears of beige and maroon. Under the circumstances I find it impossible to say anything detailed or positive about this one; as far as I can see, which isn't far at all under the circumstances, this is a mundane potboiler with no sense of excitement or surprise. Unless the dialogue contains gems to the

contrary, I suspect that Franco was drifting on autopilot. The story is a jumble of half-hearted karate fights and limp action sequences, which feel as though everyone's simply too hot and tired to make a go of it.

Antonio Mayans delivers a decent reprise of his sneering villains from *Juego sucio en Casablanca* and *¿Cuanto Cobra un Espía?*; José Llamas throws a few heroic shapes and gets his shirt off; Lina performs a wiggle-hipped dance for a middle-aged private dick called Panama Joe (Christian Bork), and certain scenes hint at developments to come in the late 1990s, with a pinky-magenta post-production filter tinting the top half of the frame. I'm tempted to say that *Bangkok, cita con la muerte* is a tedious time-waster, but the truth is that no one can really be sure given the atrocious quality of the available print. Let's chalk this one up as 'the one that got away' and accept that no filmmaker deserves to have their work judged harshly when the only available source is so unavoidably degraded.

Music: An unremarkable selection of generic Far-East adventure cues, which sound as though they've been swiped from some globetrotting Quinn-Martin TV series.

Locations: The usual succession of hotel rooms, lobbies and poolsides, from locations in Gran Canaria, Alicante, and – believe it or not – Thailand and Macao (see 'Production Notes').

Connections: Cardboard cut-out speech bubbles written in marker pen, as seen in the credit sequence, revive memories of *Lucky the Inscrutable*, with characters delineated thus: 'Riao Carrara, the quarrelsome heartthrob', 'Malko, the evil playboy', 'Marta, the young heiress', 'Flanagan, the millionaire', 'Aminia, the beautiful Siamese', and 'The famous Panama Joe' ... The name Aminia recalls Arminia, the self-styled 'princess' and brothel madame played by Romay in the 1975 film *Die Sklavinnen*, and the Amazonian queen Arminda played by Alice Arno in *The Lustful Amazon* (1973) ... The name 'Panama Joe' echoes Panama Joe Gans (born Cyril Quinton Jr. in 1896), a black boxer who made a splash in New York in the early 1920s.

GENTES DEL RIO

(SP theatrical title) *River People*

UNRELEASED

Spain, 1984/1986/1994

Alternative titles

El hombre que mato a Menguélé (second shooting period)

The man who killed Mengele

Il faut tuer Klaus (third shooting period) *We Must Kill Klaus*

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)



ABOVE Angel Ordiales (in straw hat) appears to have acted in *Gentes del Rio*, alongside Agustín Gil (holding hat) and an unknown actor wearing a red cap.
 BELOW: Howard Vernon (left) and Jess Franco (right) relax during the shooting of *Gentes del Rio*, a schedule which also saw Vernon shoot additional scenes for *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*, for use in the unreleased variant edition *Los crímenes de Usher*.



TOP: Helen Garret (left), José Llamas (centre) and Howard Vernon (right) run through a scene, while Franco lines up the camera assisted by Ángel Ordiales (far right).
 BOTTOM L: Antonio Mayans and Helen Garret in Gentes del Rio. One assumes that Mayans is playing a pimp or procurer (a common enough theme in Franco's films) while Garret's complacent expression suggests she's a battle hardened hooker rather than a blushing virgin.
 BOTTOM R: Shooting on the river for Gentes del Rio. Left to right: Jess Franco, Juan Soler, unknown actress, Lina Romay, Agustín Gil, Juana de la Mata.
 The camera is pointing towards the reeds, so it's possible Franco is shooting a supposedly tropical setting in this evidently urban locale.

Timeline

Shooting date for <i>Gentes del río</i>	1985
2nd shooting period (<i>El hombre que mato a Menguélé</i>)	1986
3rd shooting period (<i>Il faut tuer Klaus</i>)	1994

writer/director/producer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant: **Ángel Ordiales**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**.

Cast: **Howard Vernon** (Menguélé). **Manuel Zarzo**. **Antonio Mayans**. **José Llamas**. **Helen Garret**. **Rafael Corés**. **Juan Soler Cózar**. **Lina Romay**. **Kevin Connors**. **Lola Quesada**. **Manuel Alexandre**. **Carlos Isbert**. **Agustín Gil**. **Ángel Ordiales**.

Production notes: Begun in 1984, *Gentes del río* (aka *River People*) was quickly abandoned due to lack of finance. In 1986, with the participation of Howard Vernon, Franco shot new scenes in an attempt to revive the project, renaming it *El hombre que mato a Menguélé*. In 1987, probably due to the row over *Golden Temple Amazons* and *SIDA La peste del siglo XX*, Eurociné moved ahead with their own film on Mengele, called *Angel of Death*. It was directed by Andrea Bianchi, based on a Jess Franco script, and starred Howard Vernon, Antonio Mayans, Jack Taylor, Emilio Linder, Shirley Knight, and Fernando Rey, all of whom had previously worked with Franco.

The whole affair is shrouded in secrecy and bad blood, but one thing is for sure, *Angel of Death* was not directed by Franco. The only question is how a film based on a script for which he'd failed to find money should end up made by a virtual cabal of his erstwhile collaborators. In 1994 Franco claimed to have almost completed a film called *Il faut tuer Klaus*, which seems to have been another attempt at finishing *Gentes del río*. Even this failed to materialise, for reasons unknown.

UNA DE CHINOS

(SP theatrical title) *One of the Chinese*

UNRELEASED

Spain, 1985

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date	1985
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writer/director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. production manager:

Antonio Mayans. editor: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel White**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Juan Soler Cózar**. **Lina Romay**. **José Llamas**. **Ana Espejo**. **Jess Franco**.

Production notes: According to Franco this is another completed film that was mysteriously, and infuriatingly, unreleased by Golden Films. The presence of Ana Espejo in the cast suggests that it was shot soon after the back-to-back productions *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido* and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*, the former of which also features Espejo.

LA ESCLAVA BLANCA

(SP theatrical title)

The White Slave

Spain, 1985

depósito legal no: M-5.335-1985

Production company

Manacoa Films (Madrid)

Santiago Moncada Mercadal (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Unreleased theatrically.

Timeline

Shooting date	approx April	1985
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Theatrical running time

Spain	87m
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Video running time (converted)

SP 'Icaro Video' PAL VHS	88m22s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown']. writer: **Santiago Moncada**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. camera assistant: **Enrique Díaz**. production manager: **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'J.M. Marfa']. assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as 'R.M. Almirall']. music: **Jess Franco** and **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa'], sung by **Carloto Perla** and his sons [ñañigos]. music recording: **Regson**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfa 2000. *Uncredited*: co-producers: **Jess Franco** & **Santiago Moncada**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: Yvonne Manuel (Numer, tribal priestess). Karin Dior (Mary). José Llamas [as 'Jose Lamas'] (Oliver, Mary's husband). Mabel Escaño (Sylvia Grace). José Miguel García Marfa [as 'Michel Ross'] (Mark Grace, Sylvia's husband). Agustín García aka Agustín Gil [as 'Agustin Garci'] (smaller karate club thug). Diego Porta (junkie, 'Marco', 'Chico' or 'Rolando?'). James Tall (larger karate thug). Lina Romay (female karate student).

Synopsis: *A young married couple, Oliver and Mary, take a safari into the jungle, led by Mark Grace and his bitch of a wife Sylvia, along with four others. The Graces have an ulterior motive; a local tribe are willing to exchange treasure for a white female, and Mary is the intended victim. One of the guides, a junkie called Marco, has brought along extra smack to drug the unsuspecting girl. After an altercation, Mrs. Grace shoots Oliver and Mary runs off into the jungle. However, she is captured by the tribe and brought to their cavern abode, where Mark and Sylvia receive their prize; uncut diamonds. Oliver, who survived the shooting, manages to drag his bleeding body back to town, where he is cared for and befriended by a sympathetic young woman. After listening to his story, she asks two sparring partners from her karate school to seek out information that will help Oliver rescue Mary; but the heavies are more interested in the jewels, and instead of assisting Oliver they beat up Marco, shoot Sylvia and force Mark to lead them to the tribe. Oliver and the young woman enlist the help of a local eccentric and set off in pursuit...*

Production notes: For his next film, Franco dug back through his voluminous collection of unmade film scripts, and pulled out a project from 1976: *La esclava blanca*. Conceived as a retro-styled pulp-fiction jungle adventure, it failed to find distribution and instead came out solely via a horribly duplicated Spanish video release. Sexually chaste, viscerally unchallenging, and bereft of skill or showmanship, the film had nothing remotely exploitable to offer, so it's little wonder it failed to find a theatrical release, especially at a time when low budget European cinema was being crushed underfoot by Hollywood. Ever since *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, studios like MGM and Universal had been shifting their focus to B-movie tropes, with A-movie stars and budgets. Steven Spielberg and George Lucas dominated the style template, making pumped-up steroidal versions of the teen-appeal B-movies they'd loved as kids. Having tasted the likes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, adventure film audiences worldwide demanded the full Lucas-Spielberg bang for their buck. It was a firework display that European indie production could never hope to match. Whether Franco ever really thought that *La esclava blanca* was the kind of high adventure that mass audiences craved is questionable; more likely he was simply amusing himself, and hoping to sell this pup to an indiscriminating distributor for enough 'peanuts' to make another one. Sadly, even that modest ambition was stretching things too far...

In 1984 the bottom fell out of the low budget horror boom. Harder edged genre films were out of fashion, and lacklustre mainstream variants took their place. Comedy-horror gained ascendancy, franchise fever gripped the major studios, and

successful genre films were followed by weaker and weaker sequels. Simultaneously, the need for a polished 'professional' veneer became paramount. The knock-on effect was felt around the world, most notably in Italy and Spain, countries whose low budget but high intensity horror output had enjoyed strong foreign sales during the seventies, when 'cheap and nasty' could make decent money. In the eighties, 'big and bombastic' was the winning formula, and not everyone could afford it. For Franco, the depletion of interest in softcore erotic dramas, and the stifling of the horror genre, left him with few cards to play. Taking these two ingredients away from him left only a thin, unappetising soup of crime story leftovers and tail-end cuts from the action adventure tradition, which is essentially what he served up for the next two years. Frankly, 1985-1986 were bad years for Franco. A combination of wavering energy, business foul-ups and a distinct lack of inspiration dogged his output.

Review: Deep into Franco's mid-eighties hinterland, *La esclava blanca* is a jungle safari adventure so bereft of thrills it makes *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro* look like *Cannibal Holocaust*. Any viewer cutting their way through the long grass of tedium looking for jungle jollies, tribal sex rituals, flesh-ripping violence, or even just a few shots of men chomping on red gristle, will be horribly disappointed. It's an adventure film bereft of adventure, a horror film bereft of horror, and a Jess Franco film bereft of eroticism. The whole scenario is lettuce-limp: so-called tribes-people tap distractedly at their bongos while the chief's daughter, with plucked eyebrows and mascara, fires the occasional arrow at passers-by (to call the victims 'characters' would be stretching it; of the eight people who embark on the jungle expedition, the first two are killed without the others even noticing). Eponymous 'white slave' Karin Dior (who'd appeared in *La chica de los labios rojos* the year before) looks as if she'd be happier selling astrological charm bracelets at a new age market-stall than feigning terror in the grip of savages, which makes it all the more frustrating that the culinary practises of the classic Italian cannibal movies are neglected. (At least there's no animal slaughter, the one ingredient of the genre that won't be missed.) Sexploitation is limited to a few medium-shots of Dior's pubic hair; at this point in Franco's career, sex itself has been shunted off to his parallel hardcore titles. You'll probably groan with annoyance when, after a twenty minute hiatus from the main plot, during which we hang out with Lina Romay at a Benidorm pub and a dojo, we return to the tribal cave to find that Dior is still only partially nude and no closer to being skinned, ravished, or eaten alive.

Not for the first time in the 1980s, Franco creates an exploitation film with no exploitable elements, taking his habitual disregard for violent pay-offs to the extreme and failing even to deliver on the promise of forced sex with muddy primitives – surely the most basic requirement for a story about white women sold into jungle slavery? Believe me, it's really not worth getting steamed up about the racist, imperialist and misogynistic connotations; even Alice Walker would be paying for action after an hour of this nonsense.

As ever in Franco's ethno-efforts, we're deeply enmeshed in the world of colonialist pulp fiction, where the natives are either hated for making white mercantile exploiters feel jittery, or sexualised into coffee-coloured cheesecake, whose names, lives or characters we need not bother to ascertain. Fortunately, the fact that most of these tribal stick figures are played by grease-painted Spaniards undercuts the potential offensiveness of the story by rendering the whole spectacle utterly absurd.

Things perk up slightly in the last fifteen minutes, with the arrival of a demented old man wearing a Fred Flintstone loincloth and waving a plastic caveman's club, who acts as Oliver's jungle guide when he returns to save his beloved from the most tiresomely protracted sacrificial rite ever. But a few giggles are not enough to compensate for the lack of thrills. Thanks to a complete absence of energy, imagination, or commercial savvy, *La esclava blanca* is a strong contender for Franco's worst non-porno film, something that even a last-minute tip of the hat to *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* cannot assuage.

Cast and crew: For some reason, Karin Dior plays her role in a hideous black wig that looks like something a drag queen would throw in the trash. (I may be wrong, but I think it's the same one Romay wears in *Mujeres acorraladas*: see *Furia en el trópico*.) Dior showed no such desire for concealment or abjection in the hardcore *El ojete de Lulú*, in which she looks youthful, fresh-faced and naturally fair-haired ... The tribe's leader is played by the same swarthy actor who appeared in *La chica de los labios rojos* as the Emir Kal-Mahan: in both films he goes uncredited.

Franco on screen: Franco does not appear, but he does dub the parrots, as he did in *Die Sklavinnen* (1975), *Frauen im Liebeslager* (1977) and every possible opportunity since!

Music: The opening titles feature Daniel White's "Sexy Rock", first heard on 1983's *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*. Sadly its perkiness is wasted here on shots of a trundling land-rover, filmed with all the zest of a bored camera trainee picking up traffic footage for the local news. The mysterious Carlotto Perla's 'ethnological forgeries' for *Devil Hunter* are recycled too, but it shows the lack of even the most chaotic creativity on Franco's part that *La esclava blanca* fails to convey a scintilla of the delirium of that film. Various avant-garde cues from *Macumba Sexual* also return to similarly scant effect.

Locations: This is one of the few Franco films without a single shot of the sea. However, the scene in which two heavies rough up a junkie (Diego Porta) takes place in and around a seaside bar called 'The Talk of the Coast' in Benidorm, Franco's regular stamping ground. Quite how successfully a Costa-Blanca tourist trap doubles for an African safari town is debatable, to say the least.

Connections: *La esclava blanca* was probably inspired by the recent success of Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and J. Lee Thompson's *King Solomon's Mines* (1985), which offered the same racially dubious imagery ... The deity worshipped by the tribe is called Pantos, previously heard of in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*. Judging by what is meant to be a tribal carving (obviously a theme park sculpture), Pantos is a

dinosaur, specifically a Dimetrodon! What a pity he didn't make a personal appearance ... The title 'The White Slave' first turns up in the movies as a 1927 French-German silent production, *Die Weisse Sklavin*, by Italian director Augusto Genina, which was released as *La esclava blanca* in Spain in 1930. *Lesclave blanche* (1939) is a French film directed by Marc Sorkin which is rumoured to have been co-directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Starring Viviane Romance, it played Spanish cinemas for the first time in 1950 as *La esclava blanca* ... For the video-addicted British holidaymaker, a sign outside Benidorm's 'Talk of the Coast' pub advertises "Today: 2pm *Trading Places*; 4pm *Sudden Impact*; 6pm *Alone in the Dark*."

LA VENGANZA DEL RINOCERONTE BLANCO

Vengeance of the White Rhinoceros Queen

Spain, 1985

Alternative titles

La venganza del reinoceronte blanco (alt. title in SP records)

Sheila la reina de la selva (alt. title in SP records)

Anina reina de la selva (alt. title in SP records)

La salvaje (alt. title in SP records)

La rinoceronte blanco (title given in *Obsession*)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date	April	1985
Registered at Ministerio de Cultura	13 November	1985

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. music: **Daniel J. White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Karin Dior** [aka 'Karin Roberts']. **Antonio Mayans**. **José Llamas**. **Lina Romay**. **Mabel Escaño**. **Diego Porta**. **Zoe Kaplan**. **Tony Skios**. **Daniel Katz**.

Production notes: For many years, information gleaned from Franco by the authors of *Obsession* and *The Manacoa Files* indicated that *La rinoceronte blanco* was abandoned mid-shoot, although one was always aware that Franco could be vague and imprecise about the status of his unreleased work. It now appears – judging by records uncovered by Álex Mendíbil at the Filmoteca Español –

that the film was completed. As Mendibil explained to me, “*The documents are from Golden Film S.A. and I think they confirm that the film was completed – at least the shooting and master editing – but still in need of credits and some post-production for the ‘legal deposit’ in the Ministerio de Cultura.*” The documentation is headed with the title *La venganza del rinoceronte blanco*. Mendibil pointed out to me that the title contains a strange misspelled word: “*The word ‘rinoceronte’ should be ‘rinoceronte’, but ‘reino’ (meaning ‘kingdom’) and ‘rino’ are very similar. Maybe it meant the Kingdom of Rhinos? It’s weird because it appears four times spelled that way in the records.*”

Given Franco’s propensity for female lead characters, I would hazard a guess that the title points to a female ruler, not a male one. This is backed up by an alternative title for the film, also listed in the records found by Mendibil: *Sheila la reina de la selva* or ‘Sheila, Queen of the Jungle’. Add this to the ‘white rhinoceros’ of the title, and I believe that the best translation of the title would be ‘Vengeance of the White Rhinoceros Queen’. If I’m right, what we’re looking at is a film about an African tribe who worship a white rhino, led by a queen called Sheila (with a name like that she’s probably a white woman brought up in the jungle à la Katja Bienert in *Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*). However, a second alternative title is *Anina reina de la selva*, so perhaps there was some ambiguity about her racial origins? (‘Anina’ is a very rare female first name. It has Aramaic roots but is sometimes used in South American countries like Uruguay and Colombia.) Given the theme of the film, and the year, it seems very likely to me that this was shot back-to-back with *La esclava blanca*, which also featured an African tribe who worshipped a strange beast, in that case a dinosaur called Pantos! Finally, if this is true, then ‘Karin Roberts’ is probably ‘Karin Dior’, the star of *La esclava blanca*. We can also be reasonably sure that Franco shot *La esclava blanca* with money intended for the Golden Films production *La venganza del rinoceronte blanco*, using the same locations, cast and crew. When Franco stopped working on the Golden Films projects, because he wasn’t getting paid, *La venganza del rinoceronte blanco* ended up in limbo. According to records at the Filmoteca Español, Golden Films ended up with the original (silent) negative materials, but not the work-print to indicate Franco’s edit, which meant that they could not advance the project any further. Meanwhile, Franco sold its covertly shot ‘twin’ production *La esclava blanca* for Spanish video release. The ‘finished version’ if it exists somewhere is likely to be in a similar condition to *La chica de los labios rojos*: a scratchy, rough-looking work-print, with the editor’s chalk-marks visible at the transitions. **Cast and crew:** Juan Soler Cózar confirmed to me that he was the director of photography. However, information at the Filmoteca Español lists the director of photography as ‘Juan Almiral’, a variant of Joan Almirall (Lina Romay’s brother). As discussed earlier, Joan Almirall never worked on Franco’s films: his name was used by Franco himself when he wanted to conceal the one-man-band nature of his productions. In this particular case, the information citing ‘Juan Almiral’ was provided by Golden Films, who probably knew next to nothing except for what Franco told them.

EL OJETE DE LULÚ

(SP theatrical title)

Lulu’s Buttonhole or *Lulu’s Asshole*

Spain, 1985

depósito legal no: unknown

Alternative title

Dura de Tragar (alt. SP video) ‘Hard to swallow’

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

Shooting date		1985
Barcelona	23 September	1985
Madrid	14 April	1986

Theatrical running time

Spain	77m
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DVD running time (converted)

SP ‘Cine X’ PAL DVD	72m34s
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“*La primera película porno dirigida por una mujer!*” [‘The first porn movie directed by a woman’] – Advertising copy for the film’s Madrid opening in April 1986.

director: **Jess Franco** [as ‘Candy Coster’]. writers: **Jess Franco** [as ‘Candy Coster’] & **Lina Romay** [as ‘Candy Coster’]. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as ‘Iluminado Lechez’]. music: **Daniel White** [as ‘Pablo Villa’]. laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfacolor. *Uncredited:* executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as ‘Lulú Laverne’] (Lulú, a glamour model). **José Llamas** [as ‘Pepito Tiesez’] (Pepe Montalbo, a photographer). **Mabel Escaño** [as ‘Mela Chupen’] (Lola, a glamour model). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as ‘Jean Morcillon’] (Rosalinda’s boyfriend). **Pepet Payalet** (Sabrina, brunette). **Karin Dior** (Rosalinda, Lola’s fair-haired niece).

Note: ‘Pepet Payalet’ is credited in Spanish sources as a pseudonym for Diego Porta, who does not appear.

Synopsis: *Lulu’s asshole greets the camera and tells us about its troubles: its neighbour, Lulu’s pussy, is getting all the action, while the ass has to*

make do with masturbation. Eventually the situation is rectified, first by sex with Lulú's photographer friend Pepe, and then again during an orgy.

Production notes: Thanks to its fleeting availability on DVD, and its attention-grabbing title, 'Lulu's Asshole' is probably the most widely seen of Franco's hardcore films. Which is not to say that it stands out in any substantive way, but since it's fairly well known it's worth pausing here to dwell on the subject of sex in the age of officially licensed obscenity, and how that worked out for Franco as an artist...

Pornography was nothing new to Franco; he'd been filming women's vaginas for years. One thinks of the explicit revelations in *Le Miroir obscène* (1974), *Lorna... the Exorcist* (1974), *Die Marquise von Sade* (1975), *Shining Sex* (1975), *Sexorcismes* (1975) and *Wilde Lust* (1976). In all of these, Franco shouldered his camera and peered obsessively at the female anatomy; mostly just the exterior but occasionally the mucilaginous folds beyond. Erect penises, too, sprang up in his films from time to time. So what was so different now? Judging by Franco's previous work, and his lack of enthusiasm for the Fervi films, it was less to do with the organs per se, and more a matter of context. The pornographers of the 1970s, Franco included, were very much preoccupied with making porno *movies*, with plots and characters just like 'real' movies. By the mid-1980s, however, the industry was changing; punters were demanding maximum arousal and minimum distraction. A new generation of pornographers were ready to meet this demand, but Franco fell out of step with the market at this point. He seemed to find no pleasure filming long explicit fuck scenes. Was it because once hardcore was legalised, obscenity was licensed too, and so lost its transgressive power? As long as Franco was making narrative films with hardcore scenes dropped in, there was an element of rebellion, of transgression, a frisson of excitement, which pleased him and inspired him to make these gestures of creative obscenity. In the 1970s, such films challenged bourgeois restrictions; they chafed the sensitive tissues of society's sexual hang-ups. Making sex films placed you in opposition to despised bourgeois norms. In 1984, however, a space was cleared in the culture of Spain – an allotted space, an official space – where filmmakers who wanted to make hardcore porn could do so. Funnelled into tiny 'Sala X' theatres in Madrid, Seville and Barcelona, Spain's porno transgressors found themselves crowded like battery hens into a cultural 'chicken-coop'. No advertising, no publicity, no rubbing shoulders with the mainstream. Just crank out the product; keep the eggs coming. This was where the search for sexual freedom in the cinema finally led, to the indignity of being allotted a cubicle, where specimens of your fantasies could splash onto paltry little screens without leaving any sticky marks on the rest of film culture. Franco found himself for the first time in his life painted into a corner, a corner labelled 'freedom': and he didn't like it at all.

You could say that he was suffering from what Herbert Marcuse termed 'repressive desublimation': the summoning, naming and categorising of unconscious drives by external power structures

in the name of social control. In his book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse used the term to describe how moments of dissent were defused and recuperated by consumer capitalism: "the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality."¹ As can be seen from this quotation, his main concern was the effect on "higher culture", but he also expanded his observation to include the libidinal. Repressed sexual energies were being released by advertising, consumerism, and the mass media, but in commodified forms that extinguished their emancipatory edge: "This society turns everything it touches into a potential source of progress and of exploitation, of drudgery and satisfaction, of freedom and of oppression. Sexuality is no exception."² Whereas Marcuse would probably have regarded pornography itself as an agent of repressive desublimation, for Franco, who enjoyed a sexually charged form of artistic freedom until it was 'quantized' into government-sanctioned spoonfuls, there was a world of difference between perpetrating libidinal 'outrages' on the fringes of the mainstream, and being corralled into a cultural jerk-off cubicle, with the blinds, as it were, pulled around him.

Sex is everywhere yet nowhere in Jess Franco's hardcore porn films. For sure, you 'see everything', but it's a depleted and inertial sort of everything. The motive force has departed; what's left is just a wilting cavalcade. It's no wonder that a trivial farcical humour arrives in the hardcore films: they can't support themselves with their flagging sexual energy so laughter is the get-out clause. There's no secret, no surprise, no tease and no promise, these things which previously mattered to Franco – but because he cannot enjoy the game of hardcore, and the performers aren't aroused enough, there's no heat and excitement either. Franco seems to have found it all quite horrendous. Lina Romay's personal yen for comedy meant that humour was there to prop up the sex, but it's also an indication, I suspect, of embarrassment. What Franco does in his hardcore films is to giggle, to joke, to laugh at arousal. Not in a sadistic way, which would at least feed back into the libidinal, but in a deflatory way, an apologetic smirking way that says, 'Yes I know this is rubbish, but what can I do?'...

Review: *El ojete de Lulú* begins with an intimate close-up of Lina Romay's rear entrance, while on the soundtrack her anal sphincter tells a sorry tale; the pussy gets all the action, while the anus is alone and unloved. So begins a very silly variation on Claude Mulot's *La sexe qui parle* (aka *Pussy Talk*) (1975), made in a hotel bedroom in Benidorm for the price of a paella.

If you're a long-time Franco watcher, rumours of a 'talking asshole' movie tucked away in the clefts of his filmography may have piqued your interest over the years; it's bound to be comedy gold, right? When faced with the chattering orifice in question, however, it's quite a different matter, and unlike anal sex the novelty pales after thirty seconds. As Lina's orifice witters away, one hopes for the arrival of a stiff penis, the perfect silencer, but

there's no anal sex in the film, and besides, the penises on display are linguini-soft and therefore unsuited to the task. Poor old José Llamas eventually gets hard enough for a cumshot, which brings the first sex scene to a welcome close, but there's still fifty minutes of cutesy verbiage and porno nothingness to get through, and no one's brought the Spanish Fly.

In 1985 Lina Romay was at her most ample and curvaceous, but I doubt that even ass-fixated chubby-chasers will dig her vocalisation for Lulú's booty, which has all the erotic allure of nails down a blackboard. Everything about this movie seems designed to get on one's nerves, from the cutesy slang of the title ('buttonhole' indeed!) to the infantile voice of Lulú's rectal passage. If this is Franco's idea of 'back door action' he had a lot to learn. It's fully half an hour before the film depicts a sustained sexual encounter with Romay's 'buttonhole', and even then it's anilingus, not penetration, performed by Karin Dior with a diffidence that suggests she was less than carried away with excitement. For the rest of the time the focus is relentlessly vaginal, which I suppose makes the plaintive cries of the titular anus all the more poignant...

As steamy hardcore the film falls flat, but it's the silly, inconsequential humour which really puts sand in the lube. Unfortunately it runs like the clap through nearly all the Franco-Romay hardcore films of the 1980s. Yes, the scene in which Lina shoves the head of an Oscar statue up her butt is funny, for a while, but the longer it wiggles around in there, the more you find yourself wistfully remembering the highlights of Franco's career, and wondering where *his* mind was wandering as he dragged this joke out for five long minutes. At least the asshole gets a funny pay-off line: "*Life is so strange. Ignored for so long, and now I'm awarded an Oscar.*" (If only the 2009 Goya Awards had shown this clip.) It's also amusing, in a funny-peculiar sort of way, that Franco himself dubs Lina's vagina for a scene in which the two orifices argue. "*Did you see that?*" he crows, after José Miguel García Marfa contributes the second of the film's three cumshots. "*What a load! And you didn't even get a taste of it!*" Elsewhere, however, the dialogue seems to speak beyond the needs of the moment, when the anus comments over a shot of Llamas taking poolside glamour photos of the cast, "*Life went on monotonously for a few days [...] The young photographer would shoot the same relatively sexy positions of my mistress and her two friends, looking for some artistic overtones he was far from achieving.*" Funny, isn't it, how throwaway lines often ring true?

The best moment in *El ojete de Lulú* is the fade to black at the end, which rather wonderfully fails to reach complete blackness, leaving the room still about 5% visible. In the very last second Franco zooms wildly at the wall, something surely not meant to be seen, but which he included at the editing stage just for the hell of it. That really did make me laugh. As for the rest? Insert crude anal joke here...

Spanish theatrical release: *El ojete de Lulú* played for three weeks in Barcelona in September/October 1985, followed by two isolated periods in November 1985 and December 1986 (five days). In Madrid it played three weeks in April/May 1986, followed by two

further weeks, one in August 1986 and the other in January 1987. There were no bookings in Seville.

Music: The credits roll with a lush theme for strings and bongos called "Lèvres chaudes", ported in from Daniel J. White's 1971 album *Ambiance*, which sets a disarmingly stylish tone for a film that otherwise lacks any sort of élan. Elsewhere, we're treated to some dreamy lounge-music on loan from *Female Vampire*, and the Clayderman-esque piano theme from *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle*.

Locations: Exteriors were filmed at the Hotel Huerto del Cura in Elche, as seen in *Bloody Moon* and *La chica de los labios rojos*.

Connections: This is the second film to begin with a shot of Lina Romay's anus, the first being *Una rajita para dos ...* One suspects that the name 'Lulú Laverne' was chosen to echo Louise Brooks' amoral 'Lulu' in G.W. Pabst's silent classic *Pandora's Box* (1929), and not Lulu the 1960s pop singer ... On the subject of chatty sphincters, William Burroughs included a passage called "The Man who taught his asshole to talk" in his landmark book *Naked Lunch* (1959) – and trust me, it's a hell of a lot funnier than *El ojete de Lulú*.

EL CHUPETE DE LULÚ

(SP theatrical title) *Lulu's Pacifier*

Spain, 1985

depósito legal no: M-37415/85

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

Shooting date		1985
Madrid	16 December	1985
Barcelona	17 February	1986

Theatrical running time

Spain	66m
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Other formats

PAL digital master (converted)	70m08s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lulu Laverne']. writers: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] & **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne']. executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Iluminado Lechez']. editors: **Jess Franco &**

Lina Romay, music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**, sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**, Agfacolor.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulú Laverne'] (Lulú). **Mabel Escaño** [as 'Mela Chupen'] (Lola). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'Jean Morcillon'] (spectator). **José Llamas** [as 'Pepito Tiesez'] (José aka 'Paquito'). **Uncredited:** **Karin Dior**. Note: Some sources credit Diego Porta, who does not appear.

Synopsis: *Lulú and Lola perform an erotic live sex show. When a spectator makes a provocative comment, the girls invite him to take the stage. The spectator, seeing that many people are watching him, finds that criticising is a lot easier than performing, and fails to get it up. The two women are forced to resort to young José.*

Review: *El chupete de Lulú* dispenses with the talking asshole gimmick of its near namesake *El ojete de Lulú*, and sticks with a more conventional but infinitely less annoying voice-over from Lulú herself. She's a live sex performer with a dedicated fanbase (we hear a guy chanting her name at the start of the film), and the audience, whom we see periodically, are in raptures, shouting encouragements and whooping it up. They seem to be mainly comprised of elderly tourists, including women, so these shots were probably picked up at a cabaret club catering to Brits on the Costa del Sol. You never know, your Great Aunt Gertie might be in this film, clapping along to the cunnilingus.

Lulú tells us all about her sexual adventures, while performing her act live on stage, but to be honest her show is rather dispiriting. Anyone who had to spend this long trying to excite two wilting penises in a floppy fellatio threesome would, in my opinion, be well advised to retire from the stage. What must this cavalcade of soft penises have done for Lina Romay's ego? I hope she was undamaged by the experience; it's hardly her fault that Jess insisted on pairing her up with actors who were either unable to sustain an erection, or predominantly gay like José Llamas! Ironically it's Llamas who offers the hardest penis in the film: while you couldn't exactly hammer nails in with it, he stays stiff enough to reach a climax, which I guess makes him bisexual (although his romantic preferences were male, which in my view counts for more).

El ojete de Lulú had a talking asshole, and *El chupete de Lulú* has a gimmick too, albeit rather less peculiar. The Spanish word 'chupete' means 'pacifier', in the sense of a baby's dummy, which is meant to be a rather queasy innuendo relating to oral sex with dildos. In a bizarre flight of fancy, so typical of Franco, a wig is attached to one such item, which leads to a scene in which Romay lies face down with a bewigged rubber phallus stuck between her ass-cheeks, like some obscene reject from *The Muppet Show*. If the dildo had been dubbed with the voice of Fozzie Bear or Beaker, it would have made perfect sense.

The comedic highlight of the film involves José Miguel García Marfa, the game-for-a-laugh star of nearly all Franco's hardcore

flicks of the 1980s, whom we see in the audience making sarcastic remarks and criticising the performers in Lulú's stage revue. Tiring of his jibes, Lulú pulls him onto the stage and, with the help of her lesbian friend Lola (Mabel Escaño), makes him join in. The girls try to ride his soft cock, but to no avail: it's like pushing a squid up a chimney. The garrulous critic is sent packing, limp tail dangling between his legs. The lesson here is don't criticise unless you can do better – although given that this would dismantle the whole edifice of film criticism, I have to disagree on principle! One suspects, anyway, that this plot twist is merely a post-hoc explanation for the perennial difficulty Franco seems to have with male performers. He treats them with utter disinterest on camera, demanding that they do almost nothing, besides stand still and offer up their penises: no wonder the performers don't get excited! The approach is so phenomenally unsexy that one can feel one's private parts shrivelling at the very thought of being in front of his misandrist camera.

Dildos and strap-ons would seem to offer Franco the perfect way of sidestepping the irksome male member, so it's surprising that he so rarely shoots them, and even more surprising that when he does, things still don't really improve. His camera flinches away, for instance, when a dildo actually enters Romay's vagina. *El chupete de Lulú* features a strap-on scene with Lina screwing Karin Dior, but even with the means at hand to depict full penetration without the presence of a man, Franco still prefers to show just the tip of the sex toy entering the vagina. Why not have Lina vigorously pushing the whole thing inside her partner? With woman in the position of phallus, surely he can let his hair down? No way. The sex remains lukewarm, passions conspicuously fail to rage, and when Romay and Dior suck a double-ended dildo together, they pull droopy 'I'm so erotic' facial expressions that speak not of lust but of posture and pretence. I'm left with the weird sensation that Franco didn't like sex to get 'out of control': languid good, vigorous bad...

Spanish theatrical release: *El chupete de Lulú* played for a fortnight in Madrid over Christmas 1985, so if you were fed up with turkey and stuffing, you could slip away from your family on Boxing Day to X-rated theatre The Pez, to watch it on a double bill with Dan Wolman's *Lemon Popsicle 6* (released in Spain as *El crucero del placer*). In Barcelona the film played a fortnight's run in February 1986, after which it returned to Madrid for one week in September 1986, another week in May 1987, and a final week in July 1989.

Cast and crew: An unfamiliar black actor puts in an appearance during a threesome with Romay and Llamas, but he's very much unaroused and it's left to Llamas to provide the splash shots.

Music: Lots of old-fashioned jazz and lounge arrangements from Daniel White's back catalogue, including "Artistes Et Modèles" from *Musique Pour... Journal Parlé Et Télévisé*, "Clowns Chase in Rio" from *The Girl from Rio* soundtrack, and a new arrangement of the theme from *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties*. The title theme from *Female Vampire* gets a brief spin too.

ENTRE PITOS ANDA EL JUEGO

(SP theatrical title)

Between Pricks Walks the Game

Spain, 1985

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

Shooting date		1985
Barcelona	09 December	1985
Madrid	07 July	1986

Theatrical running time

Spain 70m

DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Interviú' PAL DVD 68m20s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lulu Laverne']. writers: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] & **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Pi Toties']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfacolor. *Uncredited*: executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster'] (Candy). **Mabel Escaño** [as 'Sandra Pitosa'] (Lola, Candy's best friend). **José Llamas** [as 'Paco Jones'] (young male friend of Candy #1). **Diego Porta** [as 'Pepe Poyalet'] (young male friend of Candy #2). **Concha Montes** [as 'Mona Lisa'] (Minona, a dominatrix). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'Evaristo Pichales'] (Candy's husband). **Karin Dior** (Lola's maid).

Synopsis: *Candy is frustrated because her husband has grown completely uninterested in sex. Accompanied by a girl friend she embarks on a series of sexual adventures (a foursome; a lesbian threesome; an orgy) to discover why he's become so unresponsive.*

Review: Another largely forgettable hardcore film, *Entre pitos anda el juego* has precisely one point of interest: a scene in which Lina Romay and Mabel Escaño chatter endlessly while sucking two penises at the same time. Franco himself drew attention to this, with some pride, in an interview in Cannes in 1992, and while it's hardly reason enough to see the movie, it does at least show his malicious sense of humour. The scene in question plays like two girl friends at a social evening catching up with each other's gossip

while helping themselves to an 'all-you-can-suck' buffet. Even when the young men arch themselves around to perform cunnilingus, the incessant prattle continues. It's only while fucking that the women even acknowledge what the men are doing. The humour stems from the way that males are portrayed as, essentially, dildos with a pulse, which could have been the source not just of laughs but a certain callous eroticism. However, the implied contempt remains undeveloped and an S&M interlude later is quickly abandoned without further exploration of Franco's underlying misandry, so in the absence of anything else to talk about in *Entre pitos anda el juego*, let's bring it out into the open...

Franco expressed in numerous interviews, and reiterated to me personally, his feeling that women are superior to men. He told Javier Gonzalez de Mendoza and Javier Figueroa of *Filmax Magazine*, "Women are the best of the world. I was intellectually educated by my older sister, who was an extraordinary writer and philosopher; she's the woman who taught me everything. I accept female superiority. I believe women are humanity's motor. My entire filmography is an homage to feminine characters."¹ Judging by the films, he also bought into the misandrist notion of male sexuality as mindless, animalistic, inferior, against which female sexuality is seen as sensitive, intelligent, superior. This binary opposition comes to us via Christian ideas about sex as something bestial and degrading, and the need for it as repugnant and shameful, although such ideas persist well beyond the boundaries of religious thought. Stephen Koch, analysing misandry in the films of Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey, had this to say on the subject: "The mythology [of misandry] is dominated by images of animalism. Standard epithets [...] include such random examples as 'dumb ox', 'big ape', 'beast' [...] This tradition reaches its fulfillment when some members of the women's movement, in their search for a new humanism, see fit to describe half the human race as 'pigs'. Simian comparisons proceed from the large frame and masculine body hair: one hears about 'brute strength'. In its contemporary and secular versions, the tradition is very anxious to assert female sexuality as something real. Yet that sexuality is always understood to be ethically superior to that of men: It is 'tender' and 'loving' and 'gentle', while that of the still debased, sensual, and animalistic male is 'brutal' and 'selfish'..."² It follows that if men are bestial, with their endless obscene lusting, then women are higher beings, free from the urgings of desire. In Franco's cinema, women frequently exploit male arousal while remaining unaroused themselves. Sax Rohmer's Sumuru novels, loosely adapted by Franco in *The Girl from Rio* (1968), explicitly trade in this notion. Take for instance *The Sins of Sumuru* (1950), in which the gorgeous villainess addresses the hero, Maitland: "Yes, men desire me. Once, it might have amused me to permit those bearded lips to humble themselves upon my body; but I conquered such impulses long, long ago. I sometimes surrender myself out of curiosity or to gain my ends. That ancient Roman who exhausted his passion upon an ivory statue experienced at least as much rapture as my lovers..."³

And yet, filthy conniving male desire will always find a way: it flourishes in Franco's films in the form of masochism. The man

accepts the description of his desire as low and unworthy (or at least performs as if he does); the woman, meanwhile, suitably attired in costumes chosen by the male fantasist for maximum sadomasochistic thrills, must be cold, aloof, able to switch desire on and off whilst remaining unsullied by the need for sex. This is a formulation that persists through many Franco films; we see it in *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, *Venus in Furs* and *She Killed in Ecstasy*; we see it again as the seduction of deathly desire in *Female Vampire*; in the sex-starved schmucks served up as figures of scorn in *Downtown* and *Pick-Up Girls*; the hapless victims of drug-induced lust in *Blue Rita* and *Esclavas del crimen*; the incestuously lovelorn brother who commits murder for another taste of his icy, manipulative sister in *Bloody Moon*; or the meat puppet males of *Entre pitos anda el juego*, studiously ignored by their chattering girlfriends during group sex. Sadomasochism, by 'playing along' with this hierarchy of the sexes, turns 'inferiority' into a power circuit dishing out pleasure. In *The Sins of Sumuru*, we hear that "*The chains that bound him to Sumuru were silken chains – but nevertheless unbreakable. Sumuru employed the beauty of women to secure the serfdom of men! And already, in spirit, Donovan was stretching out his hands to welcome the same servitude!*"⁴ (Rohmer's exclamation marks tell their own story here...) If religion is obsessed with a superior 'spiritual truth' that transcends material existence, earthly desire counters with a sense of play, inverting and ironising power structures and milking them for the very jouissance they attempt to repress. Franco, however, eventually tires of the male masochist, at least as a figure to depict onscreen. Instances of male victimisation fade, to be replaced by female victims and female perpetrators. This is an admirably concise reductio; men are so vile and disgusting they don't even deserve to be the masochistic object of a superior female. (And besides, he would have asserted, girl-on-girl action is hotter.) The final blip on the radar occurs in *Flores de perversión* (2003), in which male victims return for a 'last hurrah', only to be castrated in a sequence that delivers the final destination for a fantasy of male self-loathing.

None of the hardcore films Franco made in the 1980s possess the raw spontaneous urgency that speaks of genuine lust. Everyone is just 'putting on a show'. There's no sense of the performers actually getting into what they're doing. One suspects that as soon as they heard the word 'cut', the cast went straight back to their crosswords and their knitting. As for Franco himself, his interest lies in the slow reveal, the drawn-out tease. His favourite erotic archetype is the sexy dancer, with her language of arousal and deferral: 'now-you-see-it-now-you-don't'. It's little wonder that he arrives at the unadorned sex act itself not with relish but with boredom, nor that he fails to communicate arousal. Between Franco's disdain and Romay's taste for the comical, the pornographic holy grail of wild passion never stood a chance.

Spanish theatrical release: After a two-week stint in Madrid in July 1986, *Entre pitos anda el juego* popped up again in the capital for a week over the 1986 Christmas period, then bounced back for another week each in June 1987 and August 1989. In Barcelona it

played for four weeks straight in December 1985, running through to January 1986, after which it disappeared until November 1986 when it played for a further fortnight.

Music: A selection of tracks from older Franco films.

Locations: Shot in Benidorm hotel interiors only. Posters for The Beatles and Jean-Michel Jarre have been stuck on the walls to suggest that these rooms are apartments; a most economical form of set dressing!

Connections: The title is a play on *Entre pillos anda el juego* – the Spanish theatrical title for John Landis's *Trading Places*.

EL MIRÓN Y LA EXHIBICIONISTA

(SP theatrical title) *The voyeur and the exhibitionist*

Spain, 1985

depósito legal no: M-42.606-1985

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

Shooting date	circa October	1985
Depósito legal number	06 December	1985
Barcelona	17 February	1986
Madrid	28 April	1986
Seville	23 May	1986

Theatrical running time

Spain	60m
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DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Cine X' PAL DVD	56m46s
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"Una mujer dominada por la lujuria ante un hombre dominado por mil complejos." ['A woman dominated by lust, before a man dominated by a thousand complexes.'] – Advertising copy for the film's Madrid opening in April 1986.

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lulu Laverne']. writers: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] & **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne']. director of photography [& camera operator]: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. music: **Daniel White** (as 'Pablo Villa'). laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfacolor. *Uncredited:* executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**.

Cast: Lina Romay [as 'Lulu Laverne'] (the exhibitionist). José Miguel García Marfa [as 'JM Garcia Marfa'] (the peeper). Mari Carmen G. Alonso [as 'Rosy Oussy'] (lesbian friend). José Llamas (male escort).

Synopsis: *A woman relaxes in her hotel room, and becomes aware of a man spying on her from an adjacent building. At first disconcerted, she begins to play up to the unseen spy, masturbating on her bed in full view of the window, inviting a female friend to have sex with her in full view of the peeper, and making out with a young street guy. All the while, the peeper jerks off while watching through binoculars...*

Review: Released on DVD as a supplement to one of Spain's most popular magazines, *Interviú*, this initially curious but ultimately boring hardcore sex film begins promisingly, with a strange mood that's quite in keeping with Franco's more interesting work. Sadly, before long it becomes just another run-of-the-mill porn flick...

It's a shame, because the first twenty minutes convey a genuinely discomfiting atmosphere, and for a while it's possible to believe that we're embarking on a genuine filmic experiment. Kicking off with jaunty lounge music and shots of the beach at Benidorm, we cut to an overhead shot of two women sunbathing at a hotel (echoing a similar shot in *La comtesse noire*). We then see Lina Romay lounging on her bed, listening to tinny music on her Walkman (jazz, of course), and lazily peering at a porno magazine. She's in a seafront high-rise apartment block, and from her window we can see a similar block about fifty metres away. The music fades down, natural sounds rise faintly from the plaza below, and Lina begins to masturbate. We then become aware, as does she, that she's being observed by a man in a darkened apartment across the way. Lina's expression as she gazes towards the voyeur's window hovers on the border between fear and anticipation. Her attitude, combined with the absence of music, put us obscurely on edge. So far, the style does indeed back up Franco's assertion, quoted in *Obsession*, that the film has a "disturbing" atmosphere.

The gap between the voyeur's point of view and Lina's room then collapses, so that we gaze at her without the slightest sense of there being two windows and a hundred yards of space between observer and spectacle. Granted, this allows some astonishingly clear, brightly lit shots of Lina's vagina; full marks to Franco the cinematographer because the clarity is breathtaking, more like modern high-end video than 35mm. But that's not the point. The creepy atmosphere and minimalist artiness of the first twenty minutes are now ditched, and the film swiftly degenerates into a standard gynaecological examination. By the time the weary old jazz theme from 1973's *Kiss Me Killer* puts in an appearance there's nothing left of the experiment, and we slide into a mixture of basic porno shots and laughably inappropriate music. The structural basis for the story has been surrendered, with the camera's point-of-view wandering all over the place. The use of the zoom lens in a story explicitly about the voyeuristic gaze could have offered a chance to make a statement about the aesthetics of a device

many regard as Franco's technical signature. One need only revisit *Gemidos de placer* to see Franco adhering to a technical limitation with breathtaking creative results; here, however, he loses interest and lets the film dissipate into conventional porno. Four minutes in, after a couple of zoom shots from the point of view of an observing character, we are treated to a zoom representing Romay's gaze as she peers up towards the apartment that overlooks hers. Interestingly, the zoom is deployed to represent both the male observer, and Romay returning his gaze.

The first time we see the heroine's vagina is when she takes a douche, and it's resolutely unglamorous and unerotic; mundanity is emphasised by Romay's tuneless singing as she performs this everyday activity, while a tight close-up shows us the soap-clouded water. But the point of view is not Romay's, and no matter how remarkable the voyeur's binoculars may be, there's no way this intimate shot represents his point of view! The bathroom is windowless and the interior is completely hidden; the shot is from an omniscient perspective. How much better it would have been to see the peeper climb onto Romay's balcony, hide behind the door, peer into the bathroom, and thereby maintain the logic of the initial set-up! The following scene in which Romay sits before a mirror and plays with her nipples is shot from inside the hotel room looking towards the window; again, it's an angle that cannot represent either party. The camera zooms in to examine Romay's breasts, reverting to a traditional omniscient perspective. At this point we must abandon any theory that the camera is being used in accordance with a structured system of representation. To claim, as some have done, that it enacts some sort of coherent visual system is simply untenable. *El mirón y la exhibicionista* is worth seeing for lovers of Lina Romay, or long-term Franco addicts happy to catch the briefest glimmer of his minimalist art leanings. Anyone else would be well advised to concentrate on movies such as *Gemidos de placer*, *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray* or *Lorna... the Exorcist*, in which Franco delivers erotica with a sustained and genuinely creative artistic signature.

Spanish theatrical release: Clocking in at exactly an hour, according to official Spanish sources, *El mirón y la exhibicionista* played in Madrid for two weeks from 28 April 1986, plus a week in August 1986, another in December 1987 and a final week in August 1989. It also enjoyed a fortnight's run in Seville and Barcelona. Note that the version released on DVD runs three minutes shorter. Perhaps it was cut, although it's far more likely that the theatrical running time was inaccurately logged in official records.

Music: Franco drapes old-fashioned cocktail jazz cues everywhere: the *Kiss Me Killer* theme turns up three times.

Locations: The Helios Hotel in Benidorm.

Connections: Made back-to-back with *Entre pitos anda el juego* (Llamas is wearing the same trousers). A shot of a woman holding a riding crop, nude except for a fur coat, cuts to a poster of Lou Reed: one thinks of the Velvet Underground song "Venus in Furs", and by extension the Franco film of the same name – but there's no real connection, and no frisson of genuine sadomasochism.

LAS CHUPONAS

(SP theatrical title)

The Suckers

Spain, 1985

depósito legal no: M44.374-1985

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

<i>Lilian</i> footage	November	1982
Hardcore footage	circa spring	1984
Assembly of materials	circa autumn/winter	1985
Barcelona	02 April	1986
Madrid	05 May	1986
Seville	10 April	1987

Theatrical running time

Spain 72m

Other formats

PAL digital master (converted) 69m27s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Candy Coster']. writer: **Jess Franco** [as 'Candy Coster'] & [uncredited] **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almiral']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfacolor. *Uncredited*: executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] (Lulu). **José Llamas** [as 'Pepito Tiesez'] (José). **Mari Carmen Nieto** [as 'Mamen Kaplan'] (prostitute in threesome with Lulu and Mervin). **Joan Maville**. **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Tomi Proculi'] (bearded patron at nightclub). **Neivi Trepal**. *Uncredited*: **Emilio Linder** (Jorge Miranda). **José Miguel García Marfa** (fair-haired man in linking scenes) **Daniel J. White** (Inspector Mervin). **Katja Bienert** (drug addict at nightclub). **Rosa M. Martín** (Anna, blonde short-haired prostitute). **Fata Morgana** (barmaid). **Karin Dior** (girl in threesome with Lulu and José).

Synopsis: *Lulu runs a nightclub catering to drug addicts, nymphomaniacs and homosexuals. There she stages live sex shows. Sleazy police chief Mervin turns a blind eye in return for sex with the girls. When Mervin shakes down club financier Jorge Miranda, Lulu discovers that one of the girls at the club was responsible. She deals with the situation by*

injecting the girl with a drug overdose, then she and her lover José make love as the girl expires. José seduces the victim's best friend and Lulu joins in too. The film ends with Lulu giving oral sex to three men.

Production notes: In the spring of 1984, new regulations governing sexually explicit films brought a change to Franco's film universe. Hardcore sex films were legalised in Spain for the first time, but they could only be shown in designated cinemas. The old 'S' certificate category, which had suited Franco's preference for softcore sex within a commercial industry context, was withdrawn. Such films were now lumped in with 'X' certificate productions. From March 1984, films deemed to be erotica, whether softcore or hardcore, could only be shown on a handful of screens set aside for 'X' certificate product. Advertising for such films was forbidden: posters and stills could not be displayed, and newspapers would not run advertisements. This drastically reduced the money one could expect to make from erotic films. And since 'Sala X' patrons would now expect hardcore, cinema owners were reluctant to book anything else. Franco's 'S' certificate pictures simply wouldn't 'cut the mustard' next to hardcore imported from France and the USA.

When the new law took effect, Franco still had several 'S-type' pictures in post-production. If they were to survive in the new environment, they would have to be 'beefed up', so he gathered a group of friends and shot random hardcore material for insertion into these as-yet-unreleased projects. He later claimed that he marked the passage of the new law into the statute books by filming hardcore on the very night the law changed. This material found its way into at least three films, the first of which was *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, released in August 1984. The same evening's shoot provided hardcore 'boosters' for two more projects: *Un pito para tres* and *Las chuponas*. These, however, were put together later, and released in June 1985 and April 1986 respectively.

Las chuponas and *Un pito para tres* are quite similar inasmuch as both are patch-jobs, featuring the aforementioned hardcore scenes from 1984 bolted onto older softcore material. But whereas *Un pito para tres* was based around footage from an unfinished sex comedy (title unknown) shot 'back-to-back' with *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, *Las chuponas* uses out-takes from a finished film, namely *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*. It therefore makes sense to say that *Un pito para tres* was 'begun' in 1983 under a different (unknown) name, whereas *Las chuponas* was only really 'conceived' in 1985.

Review: *Las chuponas* is one of Franco's better hardcore films, thanks to the inclusion of material from an earlier project. It was assembled by Franco in 1985 (hence the 1985 depósito legal number) and grafts hardcore material shot in 1984 onto seventeen minutes of material shot in November 1982 during the making of *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*. In fact this latter footage almost certainly belongs to Franco's first cut of *Lilian*, which he'd intended as an 'S' cert film before deciding to make it hardcore.

Las chuponas sees Daniel J. White reprising his *Lilian* role as a police commissioner with corrupt links to a sex club: startlingly,

the 79-year-old composer appears in a hardcore threesome with Romay and Mari Carmen Nieto, with the girls performing oral sex on him. Before you flinch at the concept, I should point out that the explicit close-ups are in fact inserts derived from the 1984 hardcore session, and do not feature White! Also derived from the original cut of *Lilian* is a scene in which Emilio Linder (wearing a comically grotesque 'old man' mask) makes love to Rosa M. Martín, before being interrupted at gunpoint by a leather-jacketed thug who drags him to a meeting with White's police chief. Significantly, Linder's character in both *Lilian* and *Las chuponas* is called 'Jorge Miranda', which clarifies that the material was originally destined for *Lilian*. The same goes for a sequence in which Lina Romay injects Mari Carmen Nieto with a drug overdose while José Llamas watches callously: these actions fit perfectly with their amoral characters in *Lilian*. We can also see *Lilian* co-star Antonio Mayans in a couple of shots, and there's a brief dialogue scene for Fata Morgana, who plays a barmaid in both films. However, the strongest connection is the presence of 'Lilian' herself, the lovely Katja Bienert, in a non-speaking role here as a drug addict at Lulu's nightclub.

Spanish theatrical release: *Las chuponas* did fairly well for a 'Sala X' project. It opened in Barcelona for two weeks in April 1986, then played Madrid for three weeks from 5 May 1986. It returned to Barcelona for a week in June 1986, then played Madrid again for one week in October 1986 and another spanning the 1986/87 New Year). An odd-shaped slot in Seville – 11 days in April 1987 – seems to have been its last Spanish outing.

Locations: The film's lackadaisical hardcore clinches are filmed in an unusual 'sunken room', with red-brick tiling around a tiger-pattern bedspread. The same location can be seen in the hardcore inserts for *Lilian* (*la virgen pervertida*) and the porno longeurs of *Un pito para tres*. Lulu's club is the same venue seen in *Lilian*.

PARA LAS NENAS... LECHE CALENTITA

(SP theatrical title)

For the Babes... Warm Milk

Spain, 1986

depósito legal no: M-1.239-1986

Production company

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Cooperativa Cinematográfica de Distribución

Timeline

Shooting date circa November 1985

Depósito legal number 14 January 1986

Barcelona	03 March	1986
Madrid	12 May	1986

Theatrical running time

Spain	73m
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Video running time (converted)

SWE 'Garantivideo' PAL VHS	69m50s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Candy Coster']. writers: **Jess Franco** [as 'Candy Coster'] & **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as 'Joan Almirall']. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa']. laboratory: **Cinematiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfacolor. *Uncredited:* executive producer: **Fernando Vidal Campos**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] (Chelo Cucufate). **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Tomi Proculi'] (Apollonio Morsilón). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'Jean Morcillon'] (the businessman). **Mari Carmen G. Alonso** [as 'Rosy Pussy'] (Lolita, the blind date). **José Llamas** [as 'Pepito Tiesez'] (husband). **Pich Palo** (Paquito).

Synopsis: *Four hotel rooms, four stories: in the first room, a bad tempered businessman is unsatisfied with his hired female escort; in the second, a Latino man tries to persuade his dark-skinned bride to get rid of her sister who refuses to leave them alone on their honeymoon; in the third, a sex-mad woman drains the energy of her young toyboy; in the fourth, a female porn star tries to persuade her once bisexual but now gay husband to abandon his affair with their "diesel-smelling" chauffeur and return to the marital bed.*

Review: A return to the already dry well of *Elles font tout* and *El hotel de los ligues*, the revoltingly titled *Para las nenas... leche calentita* retains the vague structure of those movies but drops the pretence that Lina Romay's character can heal the bedroom woes of the rest of the cast and just chucks everyone into a big old orgy. At least this time the plot provides an excuse for the male's perennial difficulty in maintaining an erection; he can't perform while his wife's sister is lying in the next bed watching. Reasonable enough, as she looks exactly like the Cabbage Patch Doll she carries with her. Elsewhere, in a frankly tiresome way that's typical of Franco's sex films, homosexuality is characterised as a misfiring of heterosexuality, with Mayans (as an over-the-top 'screaming queen') trilling "*At last, I'm a real man*" when he finally gets it up for his wife. Packed with chirpy chatter but essentially empty-headed, this is yet more annoying rubbish from the lowest ebb of Franco's career.

Spanish theatrical release: Two weeks in Barcelona during March 1986. Madrid for two weeks from 12 May 1986, plus a week in September 1986 and a week in August 1989.

Music: The usual grab-bag of Daniel White cues.

Locations: The Venus Hotel and the Helios Hotel, Benidorm.

ESCLAVAS DEL CRIMEN

(SP theatrical title)

Slaves of Crime

Spain, 1986

depósito legal no: unknown

Production company

Herminio García Calvo

Theatrical distributor

Mundial Films S.A.*

Timeline

Shooting date 1986

Intended theatrical running time

Spain 90m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'New World' PAL VHS 89m01s

* Although picked up for distribution by Mundial, the film appears not to have been released theatrically.

writer/director: **Jess Franco** [as 'James Lee Johnson'] from a story by **Sax Rohmer**. producer: **Herminio García Calvo**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera assistants: **Enrique Díaz** and **E. [Enrique] López Quesada**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'J.A. Mayans']. make-up: **Mari-Carmen Tomas**. art director: **Carlos Spitzer**. music: **Daniel J. White**. music publisher: **Harmony**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording studio [and uncredited film editing studio]: **Arcofón, S.A.**. Agfacolor. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Tsai Chin, Fu Manchu's daughter). **Marco Moriarty** (Marco Mandell, a private detective). **José Llamas** [as 'Jose Lamas'] (Simon, the 2nd victim). **Erik Raymond** (Naismith). **Mel Rodrigo** (Jessie, Rocky's friend). **Maïte Saury**. **Maria Hill**. **Yolanda Mobita**. *Uncredited*: **Mari Carmen G. Alonso** (Tsai Chin's servant who drugs Jessie/Angela, Mandell's girlfriend [two roles]).

Synopsis: *Fu Manchu's daughter, Tsai Chin, requires money to further her plans for world domination. To achieve her aim, she arranges for rock stars visiting the Orient to be abducted, drugged and forced to part with their millions, before murdering them and throwing them in the sea. Her scheme relies upon the seductive powers of the women she employs at a cabaret which doubles as a high-class brothel, including Jenny La Motta, Laura and Madina, among others. After successfully pulling off*

the plan twice, first with rock star Rocky Walters and then his friend and bandmate Simon, Tsai Chin arouses the suspicions of Marco Mandell, a private detective. Mandell, working on the instructions of Naismith, Fu Manchu's greatest enemy, approaches Jessie, Rocky's gay friend. Knowing that Jessie is distraught about Rocky and Simon, Naismith persuades the young man to get himself abducted, with a tracking device concealed about his person so that Mandell can follow him. Meanwhile, Tsai Chin receives warning from her father in Hell that Naismith is moving against her...

Review: Inspired perhaps by the modest success of John Carpenter's *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986), Franco returns to the grand-daddy of Yellow Perils, Fu Manchu, in this occasionally sparky adventure. *Esclavas del crimen* tells the story of Fu Manchu's vengeful daughter Tsai Chin (Lina Romay, tastefully adorned with Oriental eye make-up), who is determined to follow in daddy's footsteps but finds herself hampered, rather like Franco himself, by a crippling lack of funds. With daddy's castle having been seized by the authorities in *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, daughter-dearest is forced to start over, scrimping and saving to dominate the world in her father's name. Her ingenuity is impressive; multi-millionaire pop stars vacationing in the Orient are drugged, seduced, tortured, brainwashed, and stripped of their wealth, cheque by colossal cheque. Once drained, sexually and financially, they're thrown in the sea. An excellent scheme, I'm sure you'll agree. Unfortunately, the process takes so much time you may find yourself rooting for the victims to escape, just to liven things up. We really only need to see the sting played out once; twice at the most. Instead it happens three times, very slowly, and we find ourselves observing the third 'journey to ruin' with impatience. Granted, this time it's a rock star's homosexual buddy (Mel Rodrigo) posing as the real thing, with a wire attached to his bejewelled Jim Morrison belt by a private investigator tailing the operation, but the drawn out drugging and seduction takes just as long as before. A bit of elision would have worked wonders.

Esclavas del crimen has a pleasing 'retro' feel, but sadly this isn't enough to sustain the film over eighty-five minutes. There simply isn't enough story to go round. Fu Manchu's gentleman nemesis Nayland Smith (referred to here as 'Naismith'), observes the action from a shadowy orange-grove (and, comically, a low-flying jump-jet) but he refrains from getting directly involved, perhaps because he looks about as English as Pedro Almodóvar in a Beatles wig. Eventually he steps in to warn Tsai Chin that her plan has been rumpled, but his threats make for a less than likeable hero. "You Asians are so stupid!" he sneers, rather testing the audience's sympathies during this crucial confrontation between good and evil...

But if the film lacks a plausible hero, there are some amusing conceits elsewhere. For instance, Fu Manchu, now deceased and domiciled in Hell, has obviously been getting on with Satan like a house on fire. He's been allowed to cross the threshold between Hell and Earth, responding psychically to his daughter's prayers

and warning her about Naismith. “From the unjust darkness of eternal punishment I can see that terrible dangers lie in wait,” he booms. ‘Unjust darkness’? Nice to know that he retains a sense of his own righteousness even *after* he’s been consigned to eternal damnation; now there’s a man with principles! The survival after death of Fu Manchu’s spirit is the best idea in *Esclavas del crimen*, conjuring images of the world’s worst supercriminals ‘living it up’ in the afterlife, with Hell a sort of gentleman’s club for the wicked. If only Franco had created this scenario onscreen! The film desperately needs a subplot; a few scenes set in the ultimate ‘Hellfire Club’ would have made *Esclavas del crimen* a lot more memorable.

There wasn’t enough money here to book Christopher Lee (not even at his bargain-basement 1980s rates), but a star of some sort would have helped things along considerably. Sadly the supporting cast are unremarkable, mostly newcomers to the Franco stable, probably drafted either from the local strip bars or karate clubs. With the exception of Romy and Mel Rodrigo, the latter of whom was last seen in *Sinfonía erótica* (1979), no one really stands out. Marco Moriarty dangles gamely from hotel balconies, doing his own stunts and karate-kicking Benidorm hoodlums with evident skill, but he’s a forgettable actor in other respects, a fact Franco seems to acknowledge by giving him as little to say as possible. The remaining cast are similarly lacklustre (although the unknown actor playing pretty-boy pop star Rocky Walters is easy on the eye). Moriarty might have fared better if he’d been set up as the lead character earlier on: as it is, Franco doesn’t introduce the man until half an hour into the story, and even then he’s accompanied by a voice-over from silent observer Naismith, which robs him of agency and puts him at a remove from the audience. It’s really to the various oddball elements that we must look for amusement. For instance, suspense in the final reel hinges on a rare dramatic concept: heterosexual private investigator Mandell must rescue fey gay-boy Jessie before he’s drugged into heterosexual slavery by Tsai Chin’s sexy sirens. Not exactly a pulse-pounding climax for majority-straight audiences, but full marks for originality. Then there’s the bizarre insistence on acting as though Rocky and Simon are members of the Rolling Stones. At first this seems as though it’s a kind of joke, but subsequent dialogue insists upon it: evidently we’re in a parallel universe where Mick Jagger is a dizzy blond surf-boy and Keith Richards looks like José Llamas!

It’s just a pity that underlying this daftness, Franco’s habitual denigration of gay characters persists. I’m not a hair-trigger proponent of political correctness, but it’s difficult to excuse flagrantly stupid lines like “I’m not a hero, I’m a homosexual, and I have the same fear as the weakest of women”. Franco may be progressive and anarchic in many ways, and when I met him he showed me no personal disrespect, but his writing of gay characters is frequently a mixture of neanderthal cliché and giggling vacuity, something that *Esclavas del crimen* does nothing to change. Within the story, the nominal hero Marco Moriarty is unfazed by Jessie’s sexual preferences, but the characterisation is still pretty insulting. It’s really quite tiresome, and a marked contrast to Franco’s

enlightened approach to transsexuals (see *Pick-Up Girls* and *Las chicas de tanga*), where it seems that a convincing expression of femininity over-rides his reactionary instincts.

Such matters aside, *Esclavas del crimen* is a lot more entertaining than the other films Franco had been churning out in 1985–86. This is faint praise, perhaps, considering that we’re talking about the Fervi hardcore sex films and such monumentally dull dramas as *La esclava blanca* and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*, but there’s a sliding scale of awfulness by which we can arrange Franco’s mid-1980s output, and *Esclavas del crimen* avoids the lower depths by dint of its amusing central conceit. I’d go so far as to say it’s one for prospective DVD companies to add to their lists, should the rights for an English-language release become affordable.

Cast and Crew: I can’t be entirely certain, given the atrocious videotape quality of the only available versions, but it seems to me that Mari Carmen G. Alonso plays two roles: Marco Moriarty’s girlfriend, seen briefly driving his car as he arrives into the plot, and then later, as a nude guard at Tsai Chin’s lair.

Music: Among recycled cues from a variety of Daniel White scores, the most prominent is a library track called “La folie de Néron” (from the 1973 album *Le monde musical de Racine*) which had previously been used for the opening credits sequence of *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*.

Locations: We’re back in Benidorm, with another visit to the ‘Talk of the Coast’ bar as seen in *La esclava blanca*. Stock shots are borrowed from Franco’s *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido* (1984), including material which Juan Soler shot on location in Thailand.

Connections: *Esclavas del crimen* harks back to *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) in which Fu Manchu’s daughter Princess Ling Moy (Ana May Wong) takes over the world domination business after the death of her father ... Lina Romy’s character is called Tsai Chin, a reference to the actress of that name who played Fu Manchu’s daughter Lin Tang in Franco’s *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1967) and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968) ... Plotwise *Esclavas del crimen* draws on Franco’s *The Girl from Rio* (1968) and *Blue Riva* (1977), with the use of drugs to turn men into sex slaves willing to sign away their wealth for another taste of erotic bliss ... Frequent references to the Rolling Stones (the victims are close friends of the band) are intended to bait the film with crumbs of popular culture, but surely the references could have been more contemporary? Sting, Mötley Crüe and A-ha would have been better names to drop in 1986 ... The film ends with a familiar refrain somewhat shorn of its original menace: instead of “The world shall hear from me again!” we get “The world shall hear from me very soon!” Franco evidently decided to change the line for fear of a lawsuit from Fu Manchu rights-holder Harry Alan Towers, but unfortunately there’s something comically bathetic about ‘very soon’ (it sounds like a threat from Monty Python’s would-be lion tamer Arthur Pewty) ... Interestingly, Harry Alan Towers himself began hawking round a new Fu Manchu script soon after, which was also, no doubt, due for production ‘very soon’ (i.e. it never happened).

TELEPORNO

UNRELEASED

Spain, 1986

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date 1986

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Lina Romay**. **Mabel Escaño**. **Jess Franco**.

Production notes: Apparently a porn parody of TV, à la *The Groove Tube*, this hardcore feature, according to Franco, was completed but never released by Golden Films. That the wheels were beginning to fall off the Franco wagon is revealed by the massive increase in unfinished or unreleased projects. Between 1983 and 1986, eight films (*Barrio chino*; *El abuelo, la condesa y escarlata la traviesa*; *Voces de muerte*; *Una de chinos*; *La venganza del rinoceronte blanco*; *Teleporno*; *Las tribulaciones de un Buda bizco*; *SIDA, la peste del siglo XX*) were completed but never released; one film (*Tundra y el templo del sol*) was completed by Alain Payet; and three films (*El asesino llevaba medias negras*; *Gentes del río*; *Bragueta historia*) were abandoned unfinished. To make matters worse, it was dawning on Franco that he was being taken for a ride by producer Emilio Larraga. Antonio Mayans explains: "We made 39 films for him. And Larraga said he was losing a lot of money. To lose money he would have to have been an idiot, to invest with these people, us, who make you lose so much money, you must be an idiot! Of course he was making money, but he didn't want to pay. I was working with Jess in a special arrangement with no contract, we never had a contract, but Jess had a contract with Larraga who was going to give him a third of his income for each film."¹

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Lina Romay**. **Mabel Escaño**. **José Llamas**.

Production notes: Little is known about this X-rated project, which was begun at the same time as *Teleporno* but never finished. A film once circulated by grey-marketeers under this title was in fact Alain Payet's *Infirmières perverses* (1978).

LAS TRIBULACIONES DE UN BUDA BIZCO

translation: *Tribulations of a Cross-Eyed Buddha*
UNRELEASED

Spain, 1986

Alternative titles

Las tribulaciones de un Buda vizco (alt. spelling)

Sheila, Queen of the Jungle (pre-filming title)

The Savage (alt. pre-filming title)

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date 1986

writer/director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga** and **Emilio Larraga**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar**. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording and film editing studio: **Arcofón, S.A.**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans**. **Manuel Alexandre**. **Kevin Connors**. **Lina Romay**. **Barta Barri**. **Howard Vernon**.

Production notes: This is another completed film, properly edited and post-synchronised, lacking only the onscreen credits, which for some reason went unreleased by Golden Films. Some sources claim it was a children's film, which seems plausible given that documentation discovered at the Filmoteca Español by Álex Mendíbil lists the title as *Las tribulaciones de un Buda vizco*, the word 'vizco' being a variant on 'bizco' commonly used by Spanish children. Both words mean 'cross-eyed'.

Cast and crew: Although *Obsession* credited Howard Vernon among the cast of this unseen title, the documentation uncovered

BRAGUETA STORY

UNFINISHED

Spain, 1986

Production company

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Timeline

Shooting date 1986

by Mendíbil doesn't mention him. Barta Barri, who had acted for Franco before in 1967's delirious *Kiss Me Monster*, retired from acting in 1986, making this film his last bow.

S.I.D.A. LA PESTE DEL SIGLO VEINTE

translation: *AIDS the Plague of the 20th Century*
UNRELEASED

Spain & France, 1986

Alternative title

S.I.D.A. La peste del siglo XX

Production companies

Golden Films International S.A. (Barcelona)

Eurociné (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date 1986

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khunne']. screenplay: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Juan Soler Cózar** [as 'Joan Soler']. camera operator: **Jess Franco**. camera assistant/focus puller: **Enrique López Casada**. editors: **Jess Franco & Lina Romay**. music: **Aristos Poxakis**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. executive producers: **Stella Larraga & Emilio Larraga** (for Golden Films)-& **Marius Lesoeur** (for Eurociné).

Cast: **Bill Hoversten**. **Norma Grey**. **Ricardo Palacios**. **Lina Romay** [as 'Candice Coster']. **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Foster']. **Françoise Blanchard**. **Ikki Vargas**. **Michel Rollin**. **Juan Soler Cózar**. **Mel Rodrigo**.

Production notes: According to Franco, *S.I.D.A. La peste del siglo veinte* was to have been an update of his 1975 sci-fi sex and horror masterpiece *Shining Sex*. How this might have worked is a puzzle. Instead of using chemically induced nymphomania to control humanity, the other-dimensional beings in this version use... AIDS? The possibilities are fascinating and ghastly; what a car-crash of poor taste it could have been! Sadly, it seems we may never know exactly what Franco was planning. Although the film was completed, the project fell foul of a major disagreement between Golden Films International and Eurociné over the ownership of the negative for an earlier Franco dud, *Golden Temple Amazons*. Golden Films refused to hand over the elements for *S.I.D.A.* until Eurociné returned the negative of *Golden Temple Amazons*, at which point a stand-off ensued. Eurociné dug their heels in for the earlier film, leaving *S.I.D.A.* in perpetual limbo. What seems to have happened is that Eurociné took possession

of Franco's work-print, while Golden Films hung on to the silent negative. That Eurociné nevertheless toyed with the idea of using the work-print is indicated by the fact that they paid Jean Rollin, some time afterwards, to shoot new sci-fi footage for the project. Some material was apparently filmed, including fx footage of flying saucers, but Rollin reportedly pulled out after refusing to shoot a very cheap (and potentially dangerous) special effect involving a child. In 2018, writer Alex Mendíbil discovered the silent negative, complete with credits, in the collection of the Filmoteca Español where it was deposited by Fotofilm Madrid in 1999.

Cast and crew: Françoise Blanchard (the eponymous lead actress in Jean Rollin's beautiful *The Living Dead Girl* (1982), would have been making her third appearance in a Franco project, the others being *Revenge in the House of Usher* (as Melissa) and *Golden Temple Amazons* (in which she's one of the warrior women). Co-star Michel Rollin's father, Georges Rollin, appeared in three early films for Franco, most notably *La muerte silba un blues*.

PHOLLASTIA

(SP theatrical title)

depósito legal no: M19393-1987

Spain, 1987

Alternative titles

Fellations sauvages (FR video)

Production company

Phalos Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Fervi Films

Timeline

Shooting date	circa January	1987
Rated 'X' in Spain	22 June	1987
Madrid	29 June	1987
Barcelona	03 August	1987
Seville	29 January	1988
French visa 67869 issued	02 June	1988
France	22 June	1988
French video release		1988

Theatrical running time

Spain	80m
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Video running time (converted)

SP 'De Sade' PAL VHS	86m44s
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director: Jess Franco [as 'Betty Carter']. **screenplay:** Lina Romay [as 'L.L. Laverne'], Jess Franco [as 'Chuck Evans']. **music:** Daniel White. **director of photography:** Jess Franco [as 'Terry de Corsia']. **Uncredited:** camera operator: Jess Franco. **editor:** Jess Franco. **producer:** Tako Pezonaga [MF].

Cast: Lina Romay [as 'Jean Collins'] (Barbara Carrington). C. Gonzalez Ordi [as 'Rex Robinson'] (Blake Carrington). Carlos Quiroga (Alain Carrington, Blake's son). José Miguel García Marfa [as 'Morgan Childrun'] (Crawford, the family butler). M. Fernandez Merino [as 'Melania Robson']. A. Bartos Velasco [as 'Bruce Leduc']. Elisa Mateo [as 'Traci King']. R. Saez Montoro [as 'John Olms']. *The Manacoa Files* adds: Zulma Minutti.

Video cover mentions only 'Jean Collins' from the above, and adds: Pat Kelly. Jackie Lemon. Veronika. Sigourney Grant. Lenny Sommers.

Synopsis: *A wealthy couple, the Carringtons, are on the verge of a divorce. The husband, Blake, struggles to keep the money flowing for his wife's expensive tastes. Their daughter Falon secretly has sex in her bedroom with her boyfriend Alan, and their gay son is being initiated to straight sex by Dorothy, the maid. When Blake's ex-wife turns up and demands a share of the Carrington estate, the family reaches crisis point, but it's nothing that cannot be resolved with a big old orgy...*

Production notes: The Franco-Romay hardcore movies made between 1983 and 1986 succeeded financially, for a while, because they were made on the back of non-hardcore productions, and their production costs were virtually non-existent. Franco could therefore make a decent return despite the restrictions imposed by the government on 'X' certificate films. It was only with *Phollastia* and *Phalo Crest*, a pair of porno 'super-productions', that he made a commercial mis-step, as Antonio Mayans explained: "*It all started to go wrong when Jess decided to make more complex things ... There was no point in making films for a certain budget and then not being able to sell them for more money than they had cost. Our usual trick was to make films really cheaply, so if you sold them for a couple more dimes than they had cost, then you could make another film. But this was impossible with Phollastia and Phalo Crest. We couldn't get our money back on them ... To go to Benidorm to make two porn movies with a crew, with an ordinary film structure, simply doesn't work out in terms of money, and I told him. I took it on myself to go to Barcelona to sell them and I sold them as expensively as I could at the market price, and while the films were well enough sold, it was still for less money than we had spent on them.*"¹

Review: *Phollastia* opens with a blue-tinted shot of a penis masturbating into camera, filmed through a weirdly segmented lens; it's either the point of view of a fly on viagra, or the sort of effect you get after a long night's drinking when your eyes have stopped pointing in the same direction. It's followed by a young

man awakening from a wet dream, and then a close up of a woman peeing into a toilet and douching her pussy. Franco neglects to show the woman's face before concentrating on lingering close-ups of urination, which says a lot about how much care was taken with construction in *Phollastia*.

The usual Franco hardcore elements are present and correct. Vaginas are licked and nuzzled in tight close-up, always the most lovingly filmed aspect of his porno productions. Typically, Lina Romay is required to perform oral sex on a penis that shows no inclination to respond, and a few 'ho-hum' fuck scenes take place, although some of these do involve functioning erections, so all credit to them. To wrap things up, the cast play an 'erotic' version of blind man's bluff, the staging of which has all the enthusiasm of W.C. Fields at a children's birthday party.

Elsewhere we see the Carringtons' gay son Alain (handsome young actor Carlos Quiroga, later to be seen in *Fall of the Eagles*) being schooled in heterosexual sex by the family maid, echoing similar plot devices in *Ópalo de fuego* (1978), *Elles font tout* (1978) and *El hotel de los ligues* (1982). Typically for Franco, the presence of a gay character is a cue for some frankly neanderthal humour in which homosexuality is treated as a defect in need of correction. Whilst they turn up with increasing frequency in Franco's eighties films, gay men are rarely allowed simply to be that way in Jess's films: they are either lampooned as comic queens or steered towards pussy, in plot lines that would be flat-out offensive if they were not so ridiculous. That said, amid the thoroughly mundane humping and sucking on display here, the only image that's likely to catch the bored viewer's eye is the maid, Dorothy, wearing a Groucho Marx face mask and a strap-on pump-action dildo which squirts white fluid over Quiroga's face. Beat that, *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Dressed up, if that's the right term for such skimpy storytelling, as a parody of the warring families in the American TV soap opera *Dynasty* (1981-1989), with everyone swanning around in a chic apartment wearing big frocks or evening wear, *Phollastia* gestures limply towards satire but ends up as just a dumb porno blur. If it weren't for Lina Romay on screen, and Daniel White on the soundtrack, you'd never even guess Franco made it.

Spanish theatrical release: A decent three-week run in Madrid, followed by a week in July 1988 and another in February 1992.

Music: The title theme by Daniel White was first used for *Ópalo de fuego*.

Locations: Benidorm.

Connections: The father is called Blake (as in Blake Carrington from *Dynasty*), while Lina Romay plays 'Jean Collins', a parody of Joan Collins.

Other versions: French sources suggest that *Phollastia* was retitled *Fellations sauvages* for theatrical release on 22 June 1988. In addition, along with its companion-piece *Phalo Crest*, it was one of only two Franco hardcore films of the eighties ever to see a video release outside of Spain, when it was picked up by Fil à Film for their 'Prestige Collection' ... A version doing the rounds online is dubbed into French, but bears the Spanish title and credits.

PHALO CREST

(SP theatrical title)

Spain, 1987

depósito legal no: unknown

Alternative titles

Falo Crest (SP alt. theatrical/SP video)

Chiennes et Dominatrices (FR video)

Unconfirmed titles

Caprices sados pour salopes du plaisir

Caprices sodos pour salopes du plaisir

Production company

Phalos Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

Fervi Films

Timeline

Shooting date	circa January	1987
Madrid	08 August	1988
Barcelona	21 September	1987

Theatrical running time

Spain 80m

Video running time (converted)

SP 'De Sade Video' PAL VHS 85m52s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Lennie Hayden']. director of photography: **Terry de Corsia**. music: **Daniel White**. written by: **Jess Franco** and **Lina Romay** [as 'Lowel Richmond' & 'Preston Quaid']. *Uncredited*: camera operator: **Jess Franco**. editor: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Tako Pezonaga** [MF].

Cast: **Elisa Mateo** [as 'Jane Morgan'] (Angela Channing). **C. Gonzalez Ordi** [as 'John First'] (Lance Channing). **Lina Romay** [as 'Brenda Haven'] (Maggie [sometimes 'Melissa'] Channing, Lance's wife). **A. Bartos Velasco** [as 'Mel Powell'] (Richard Channing). **M. Fernández Moreno** [as 'Lida Edwing'] (Miss Page, Richard's secretary). **Sado Summers** (Julia Channing). **Carmen Carrión** (Prison Governess). **José Miguel García Marfa** (Angela Channing's manservant). *The Manacoa Files adds*: **Zulma Minutti**. *Video cover mentions only* 'Jean Collins' from the above, and adds: **Lola Falona**. **Fess Parker**. **Twin Welamy**. **Guia Corrington**. **Andrew White**. **Wendy Cano**. **Sigurney Grant**.

Synopsis: *Manipulative matriarch Angela Channing invites her children, Maggie, Julia, Richard and Lance, to a dinner party. Maggie brings her husband Chase, Lance brings his wife Melissa, and Richard*

brings Miss Page, his secretary. Julia, a lesbian incarcerated at a women's prison, is allowed to attend the party because Angela Channing had an affair with the Prison Governess while the two were at school. After revealing to the family the secret of Phalo Crest's top-selling wine (it includes semen), she drugs them all with an aphrodisiac and persuades them to sign away the rights to Phalo Crest's lucrative new champagne. An orgy develops, during which everyone gets it on together, and the party climaxes with Angela Channing being sexually serviced by her sons and daughters, their spouses and her servants.

Production notes: Despite the opportunity which pornography extends to the rebel, it's interesting that paraphilias and perversions do not play a part in the eight hardcore films Franco made for Fervi Films between 1983 and 1986. They are all relentlessly 'square' (unless one takes an antediluvian attitude to lesbianism or threesomes). The 'Lulu' films, despite featuring a talking, sentient female asshole, don't even feature anal sex. Their only divergence from the most basic porn template is humour. There's no sadomasochism; no sodomy; no incest; no roughness; no fetish play; no bondage. The closest thing to perversion is the peeping tom of *El mirón y la exhibicionista*. Only in 1987, just prior to his return to mainstream moviemaking, did the erstwhile enfant-terrible venture into the Elysian fields of the truly perverse, with *Phalo Crest*, a kitsch parody of the US TV series *Falcon Crest*, in which incest steers the plotline, master-servant relationships are back on the table, rape and scatological sadomasochism beef up the transgression quotient, and even the comedy includes shocking elements that make *Sadomania's* dog-rape scene look tame...

Review: *Phalo Crest* is quite different to *Phollastia*, which is surprising given that they were conceived and directed as a pair. Whereas *Phollastia* was drably routine, *Phalo Crest* is amusingly repellent, with a plot encompassing a variety of erotic 'refinements' including incest, scatology, water-sports, S&M, and sex with the mentally handicapped. Sounds great, right? Bear in mind, before you reach for the door, that all of these acts take place within a comic framework that *may* be in very poor taste, but which doesn't really plumb the extremity to which it alludes. Like all Franco's hardcore films it's just a farcical comedy with cocks and pussies ('*It's so embarrassing to see my husband shoot cum in public!*' moans Maggie, as her mother fellates Lance at the dinner table), but at least this time the transgressive elements, and some occasionally revolting imagery, prevent the whole thing from turning into a cutesy charade. The incest theme kicks in from the start, with a telephone call from mother to son; as they speak, she's being licked between the labia by her servant, and he's getting a blowjob from his secretary. The two of them trade polite conversation while trying not to let their squeaks of arousal give the game away. (As for what happens to the servant while he's munching on Madam's hairy vagina; let's just say it shouldn't happen to a dog.) The prison subplot featuring lesbian daughter Julia accounts for the grossest imagery in the film, as she's subjected by the Governess

in a three point penalty in return for permission to attend her mother's party: she must eat shit, drink piss, and get fucked by two comedy retards who look like the ridiculous zombies from Jean Rollin's contribution to *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*. If that's time off for good behaviour I'd hate to see the punishment ~~and~~. The scatological scene is quite disgusting, but clearly fake; the actress, one 'Sado Summers', is in no way either sickened or grossly aroused (surely the only two plausible responses); instead, as Franco regular Carmen Carrión presides smirking over her amusement, she casually turns away from the befouled asscrack, ~~looks~~ into camera, and shrugs, "It's not that bad".

The film climaxes with a prolonged party scene, the highlights of which include drinking wine mixed with freshly deposited semen (reminiscent of 1978's *Cocktail spécial*), and incestuous sex between the mother and her (adult) children. At long last, after twenty years of ~~staring~~ round the topic, *Phalo Crest* sees Franco depicting incest unambiguously: no mention of step-parents or stepchildren here. Angela gets her daughters drunk and encourages them to have lesbian intercourse while she manipulates their pussies ("Come, my lovely, come!"). At the end of the film she invites her sons to gather around for the ultimate 'family get-together', an intimate bukkake orgy (and if you don't already know what 'bukkake' means, you probably shouldn't). It's about as close to a John Waters film as Franco ever made, but it lacks Waters' torrent of verbal wit and his fierce affection for his lunatics and dropouts. *Phalo Crest* is the last hurrah in a string of hardcore pornos of mostly dire quality, made just before Franco's return to the mainstream for Eurociné and René Chateau. It's an obscene absurdist amusement for those whose tastes extend to the weird and perverse, and it's probably Franco's best Spanish hardcore film, but there are elements here that suggest the offer of reputable work arrived just in time...

Franco on screen: Jess provides the voice of Professor Spencer, the old man who reveals the secret of the Phalo Crest vineyards – something about the land having once been an orange grove where the farmers used semen to fertilise the oranges, resulting in delicious orange-and-sperm flavoured wine. Seriously, that's what he says. Ever the gourmand, Jess...

Music: The title music takes the florid theme from *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* for one last spin round the ballroom. There's also a previously unheard Mariachi-style version of the theme to *Delia* (*la virgen pervertida*), and lots of music drawn from *Shining Sex* and *Female Vampire*.

Locations: Benidorm.

Connections: *Phalo Crest* is of course a parody of *Falcon Crest* (1981-1990), an American TV soap in the style of *Dallas*, about a rich wine-growing family in California. The parallels are numerous: Angela Channing is the name of the corrupt matriarch in both 'versions'. The other characters whose names echo their TV counterparts are Julia, Chase, Maggie, Lance, Melissa, and Richard ... The film includes a shot of a penis being masturbated, filmed with a faceted lens, which is borrowed from twin-production *Phellastia*.

DARK MISSION

Spain & France, 1987

French visa no: 66652

Original theatrical title in countries of origin

Dark Mission (*Les fleurs du mal*) (FR)

Dark Mission (*Operación Cocaína*) (SP)

Vaarallinen tehtävä (FIN video) *Dangerous Mission*

Alternative titles

Dark Mission *Flowers of Evil* (FIN English-language video)

Παντεβου σ την κολαση (GRE video) *Appointment in Hell*

Dark Mission (*Avenida Bolivar 331*) (SP video – screen title)

Dark Mission (*Avda. Bolivar, 331*) (SP production listing)

Coca & C.I.A. (original 111-page script)

Flowers of Evil (title announced in *Variety*)

Unconfirmed title

Narcotráfico (POR?)

Production companies

Siodmak S.A. Films (Spain)

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Vision Films (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date	April-June	1987
SP classification date	22 December	1987
French visa issued	13 April	1988
Seville	15 July	1988
Barcelona	19 August	1988

Theatrical running time

Spain	85m
France	92m

Video running time (converted)

87m18s

director: **Jess Franco**. writers: **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khunne'], **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.L. Mariaux']. producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. dialogue: **Georges Freedland**. director of photography: **Roger Fellous** [as 'Roy Fellous']. focus puller/camera assistant: **Enrique López Quesada** [as 'Enrique L. Quesada']. camera operator: **François Desmet** [as 'F. Desmet']. assistant director: **Ilona Kunesova**. script supervisor: **Carmen Carrión**. promotion director: **Juana Hernández**. art director: **Jaclyn Freedland**. sound engineer: **J.C. Reboul** [as 'J.C. Rebull']. editor: **Lina**

Romay [as Rosa M. Almirall]. director of production: **Marius Lesoeur**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. assistant production: **Hugo Mezcuca**. special effects: **Tom Anouk** [as 'Tom Annouk']. weapons/stunt co-ordinator: **Manuel Mann**. costumes: **Annick Laine** [as 'Ann Laynn']. make-up: **Mari Carmen Tomás** ['Mary C. Thomas']. gaffer: **José Luis Arcos** ['José Arcos']. music: **Louis Alborado**. sound recorded at **Audio-Films Philippe Sarde** in Dolby Stereo. helicopter footage: **Stephane Deplus**, E.C.P.A. Picture. with thanks to **Aerospatiale** (helicopters); **Angeniueux**; **Sony** for their collaboration during shooting. **Moët et Chandon**. laboratory: **Vitfer**. titles & optical effects [Export version]: **Michael Ray**. titles (SP version): **Christine Rapilly** [as 'C. Rapilly']. sound re-recording: **Sincronía**. cameras and lenses: **Panavision**. Dolby Stereo. IMDb adds: foley artist: **Manuel Carrión**.

Note: the credits also declare the film was 'produced by Tako Pezonaga'. However, Ms. Pezonaga's role was essentially promotional: she was the 'Director of Promotion and Image' for the Spanish government and worked on theatre and film promotion with her frequent associate Juana Hernández (here credited as 'promotion director'), who was the wife of Spain's then Minister of the Presidency (ministro de la Presidencia), Javier Moscoso.

Cast: **Christopher Lee** (Luis Morrell aka 'Luis Montana'). **Chris Mitchum** (Carpenter aka 'Derek Timothy Bannon'). **Richard Harrison** (Sparks, CIA Chief). **Cristina Higuera**s (Linda Montana). **Daniel Katz** (Mr. Trinidad Barrios, a drug dealer). **Alicia Moro** (Elena Barrios, Trinidad's wife). **Antonio Mayans** (Dr. Merrill Ramos). **Brigitte Lahaie** (Moirá Panella). **Trino Trives** (Minister). **Henri Lambert** (Antonio, Montana's manservant). **José Miguel García Marfa** [as 'J.M. Marfa'] (Hotel receptionist). **François Desmet** [as 'Frank Desmet'].

Synopsis: *At the instigation of his contemptuous boss, Sparks, Derek Carpenter, an investigator for the CIA, goes undercover in Lima as journalist Derek Timothy Bannon. His task is to track down and eliminate Luis Montana, a Cuban drugs smuggler and arms dealer. An ex-Cuban revolutionary, Montana is in the CIA's sights not so much because he's a drugs smuggler, but because, as an ex associate of Che Guevara, his scalp would make public relations capital in America's war against communism. On the plane, Carpenter is seated next to Montana's daughter Linda, who, unaware of her father's business, is visiting him purely for a holiday. The two become friends, and swiftly lovers. Arriving in Lima, Carpenter makes contact with two drug-dealing rivals of Montana, Trinidad and Helena Barrios, a husband and wife team who offer Carpenter a deal: they will shop Montana and undertake not to supply drugs to the USA, if Carpenter can arrange a guarantee that the rest of their worldwide trafficking will go unpunished. Carpenter receives further instructions on the ground from Moira, the wife of his recently deceased buddy and partner. Moira blames Carpenter for her husband Frank's death, but softens when Carpenter reveals the*

truth; Frank had been tempted into corruption, and Carpenter took the blame for the resulting shoot-out to save his partner's reputation. After one of Montana's drugs consignments is ambushed by Barrios's men, Montana declares war on the rival traffickers, leading to the death of Helena Barrios. Her husband swears to avenge her. Meanwhile, Derek takes Linda to a drugs treatment centre run by Dr. Merrill Ramos, who gives them a guided tour around the facility, showing them drugs casualties ranging from the addled to the brain-damaged. Linda sees an old friend carried out dead from the facility, and after Carpenter reveals why he's really in Lima she realises she must confront her beloved father about his heinous trade...

Production notes: *Dark Mission* was filmed in English with direct sound during May and June 1987, according to a contemporary press interview with Cristina Higuera who plays Christopher Lee's daughter in the film. A report in *Variety* dated 6 May 1987, however, announced that principal photography was already completed by that date, so shooting must have started in April.

Review: Jess Franco is back! With helicopters! Christopher Lee! Stock footage of the Cuban Revolution! A wedge of exposition conveyed by a silly computer voice! A bank of TV screens intended to convey some kind of hi-tech military nerve-centre, although it's probably the window display of an Alicante TV shop! Oh, and Chris Mitchum (there's always a catch). *Dark Mission* is a properly budgeted production, with stars, explosions, action scenes, and lots of goofy dialogue. It's an easy film to pass over when you're concentrating on the best of Franco's personal films, but this relatively straightforward action flick is enormously enjoyable if you've watched a few too many of the director's mid-1980s misfires. Mitchum plays our hero, Derek Carpenter, a CIA man chosen for a particularly sensitive and important undercover mission in South America. "You are violent and cynical. A drunk, and a womaniser," a helpful chief of security tells him during his initial briefing. That's not information about his cover story, by the way, it's just his boss (action legend Richard Harrison), telling us, the audience, what we need to know. "Carpenter! I don't like you," he adds. Well I'm glad that's been cleared up.

Dark Mission is nonsense, but it's fun nonsense, and a breath of fresh air after the impoverished porno films Franco had been making just prior to it. Christopher Lee is a welcome sight indeed, the biggest star to appear in a Franco film since Klaus Kinski in *Jack the Ripper* eleven years earlier, and although he's not particularly well served by the script he brings effortless gravitas to the role of drugs overlord Luis Montana. It's perhaps a bit jarring to hear him spit lines like "I want to know where those sons of bitches come from!" at some hapless lackey, but the face, the voice, the looming presence, the solemnity and politesse, all add that extra lustre. His talent helps to balance the scales in the face of hamfisted and comical elements elsewhere in the proceedings. The production is brisk and the technical credits reasonably professional, but that doesn't stop an accumulation of goofs and misfires piling on the



*TOP: Drug lord Luis Montana (Christopher Lee) attempts to allay the suspicions of his daughter Linda (Cristina Higuera).
BOTTOM: Moira (Brigitte Lahaie) leads her mercenaries into battle against Montana's men.*

hilarity. For instance, when corrupt Cuban militiamen intercept one of Montana's drugs consignments, they push the courier's landrover off a cliff to make it seem like an accident; unfortunately, the damn thing explodes while still dangling over the edge. You can imagine Franco, just out of shot, hopping with fury.

As for the plotting, it's so relentlessly contrived you just have to laugh. The best moment occurs at a drugs rehabilitation centre: Montana's naive daughter Linda is on a guided tour when, quite by chance, a corpse is wheeled past on a stretcher: "*It's my best friend Maria!*" she exclaims in horror. Since we've never met Maria, and she hasn't been mentioned before, it's as much of a shock for us as it is for Linda. A few moments later she declares her love for Carpenter, a man whom she met for the first time two days ago, so she evidently operates on a faster time stream than the rest of us.

Dark Mission's biggest handicap is Chris Mitchum, an actor who can't even *walk* convincingly (he looks as though he's having to think about how to move his arms). We're supposed to wonder whether Carpenter really is the cynical love rat his boss described earlier, or a decent man hiding behind a cynical pose, but thanks to Mitchum's default facial expression of bland insincerity the ambiguities are rather lost. Thank goodness the script gives him a few choice lines: "*You have very cold lips. They say that a woman's lips are a reflection of her soul,*" he says to drug-dealer Helena Barrios, one of the many howlers that make up for deficiencies elsewhere, along with zingers like, "*You're either a very good girl who thinks she's a tramp, or a tramp who thinks she's a very good girl,*" and "*Do you work in a strip joint, or are you here to marry the Prime Minister?*"

Among the other cast members it's good to see the excellent Daniel Katz make the transition from Franco's smaller budgeted films to the larger productions of the next two or three years (he's in *Esmeralda Bay* and *Downtown Heat* too). Katz is a fine actor and it's a shame he seems to have disappeared from the industry after his final Franco credit in 1990. The aforementioned Richard 'Ninja Master' Harrison shows off his ageing physique in a gratuitous bathroom scene, while sinister French film regular Henri Lambert reappears in his second role for Franco (he played a soldier driven insane by the undead in *Oasis of the Zombies*). Among the female cast the real stand-out is adult-movie icon Brigitte Lahaie, whose strong, sculptural features and elegant posture always lift a scene. She's the sort of woman who turns heads, and she can act a hell of a lot better than most of her films require. She reminds me a lot of Marilyn Chambers, the American porn actress who gave such a powerful and memorable performance in David Cronenberg's *Rabid* (1977). Evidently she and Franco had patched up their relationship after the row that occurred during the shooting of *Je brûle de partout* back in 1978 (see review). It's just a shame Lahaie's role isn't more central, although she does provide the one truly emotional moment in the film, during a stand-out scene in which she learns the bitter truth about her dead husband.

There's none of the madness of Franco's finest work to be found here, but don't let that put you off. The charms of *Dark Mission* lie in its casting: if you enjoy watching C-list figures from Euro-

exploitation duking it out with slumming celebrities from Blighty, *Dark Mission* is a treat, and for fans who've witnessed just how cheap Franco's productions became in the 1980s it's a pleasure simply to see him working with a sizeable budget again. If the result is a little impersonal it's not without its own daffy Eurotrash appeal, and ably sustains its ninety-minute running time.

Cast: Cristina Higuera was a former TV host from the channel TVE, well known for the show *De 7 en 7*. Franco spotted her on television, and according to Higuera, "*Before [the show] ended its broadcast I had been hired by the producer because I had the image that Jesus was seeking for this character.*" On the subject of Christopher Lee, she said, "*He's an exceptional actor and in the short time working at his side I learned a lot more than with anyone else [...] I will never forget our joint performance in one of the scenes of the film: it's an emotional sequence in which he explains why he is in the world of drugs.*"² In an article for the Spanish newspaper *ABC* six months later, she expanded on the subject of Lee: "*Christopher Lee told me that the difference between a great actor and a non-actor is mainly in the eyes. He was my father in the movie and we had some beautiful sequences. In one of them, a dramatic close-up, I remember that with his eyes he guided me wonderfully so that I could move and respond. The truth is that I got goose bumps many times.*"³

Music: After a decade of the same Daniel White compositions over and over again, it's a pleasant change to hear music that's not immediately familiar. That said, there are some staggeringly inane cues here. On the other hand, a subtly shifting piece for sax and flute works wonders, and it's oddly enjoyable to hear some regulation horror-synthesiser drones, so common in other low budget exploitation movies but rarely used by Franco.

Locations: Alicante, Elche, Murcia, La Manga del Mar Menor and Lo Pagan, with additional shooting in Madeira.

Connections: *Dark Mission's* overt moral tub-thumping about the wickedness of drugs sits uneasily in the libertarian career of Jess Franco, although the theme had been building up quietly in his work during the 1980s (and can be found to a degree in much earlier films like 1972's *Sinner*). Here, although the focus is on organised crime and the connivance of corrupt South American governments, subtleties are steamrollered by a script that resorts to a full-blown lecture on the evils of substance abuse, subscribing to the 'gateway drug' theory that paints even cannabis as dangerous. Perhaps the moral dimension of the story helped to snare Christopher Lee's participation? *Dark Mission* was Lee's first work for Franco since *Count Dracula* in 1970, and the first time they'd worked together since his allegation that Franco had bumped up the sex quotient in *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* quite literally behind his back. The actor's decision to let bygones be bygones (he followed *Dark Mission* with *Fall of the Eagles* for Franco in 1990) may also have been guided by expediency: he was in a major career slump at the time, having appeared in some less than dignified projects – see the deliriously silly horror sequel *Howling II: Stirba – Werewolf Bitch* (Philippe Mora, 1985) and the ultra-lowbrow teen comedy *Jocks* (Steve Carver, 1986).

FACELESS

English-language video/DVD title)

France, 1987

French visa no: 66828

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Les prédateurs de la nuit (FR theatrical)

Alternative titles

Los Depredadores De La Noche (SP theatrical)

Sem Face (POR DVD)

Dihos prosopo aka **Δίχως πρόσωπο** (GRE video) *Without a Face*

I violentatori della notte (IT video)

Production company

René Chateau Productions (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Editions René Chateau (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date	Dec-January	1987-88
French visa issued	22 June	1988
France	22 June	1988

No Spanish, British or American theatrical release.

Theatrical running time

France	97m
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DVD running time (converted)

FR 'René Chateau' PAL DVD	102m36s
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director: **Jess Franco**. producer: **René Chateau**. story: **René Chateau** [as 'Fred Castle']. adaptation: **Pierre Ripert**, **René Chateau** ['Fred Castle'], **Jean Mazarin**, **Michel Lebrun**. music: **Romano Musumarra**. Editions Productions Georges Mary. songs: "Faceless" by **Romano Musumarra & C. Weisman**, performed by **Vincente Thoma**; "Just Imagination" by **Romano Musumarra, W. Martino & C. Weisman** with kind permission of EMI-Pathe Marconi; "In the Heart of the City" by **Romano Musumarra & C. Weisman**. cinematography: **Maurice Fellous**. 2nd unit cinematography: **Jean-Jacques Bouhon**. editor: **Christine Pansu**. unit production manager: **Nicole Boisserie**. production assistant: **Valerie Lieupart**. production secretary: **Sophie Darragi**. production accountant: **Annie Chelossi**. production manager: **Frederic Bal**. assistant production manager: **Christine D'hauteville** [as 'Christine Dhauteville']. special effects: **Jacques Gastineau**. 1st camera assistant: **Francois Hernandez**. 1st camera assistant: **Isabelle Ferrandis**. 1st

assistant director: **Elisabeth Parniere**. 2nd assistant director: **Jean-Christophe Jossot**. sound: **Jean-Louis Ducarme**. boom operator: **André Rigaut**. script supervisor: **Laura Harrison**. set decorator: **Yann Arlaud**. property master: **Fernand Billet**. assistant property master: **Renaud Alcalde**. chief make-up artist: **Eric Pierre**. make-up artist: **Soraya Boulay**. hair stylist: **Martial Corneville**. costumes: **Danièle Bersiaud**. key grip: **Patrick Gentil**. grip: **Fabrice Lignot**. chief electrician: **Rene Rochera**. electrician: **Stephane Rochera**. stills: **Gilbert Moreau**, **Michel Dreyfuss**. 1st assistant editor: **Anne Wasela**. 2nd assistant editor: **Sandrine Plaud**. foley artist: **Henri Humbert**. sound recordist: **Anne Le Champion**. sound mixer: **Jacques Jullian**. sound re-recording: **S.I.M.O.** public relations: **Alain Duverger**. laboratory: **Laboratoire clair**. film: **Fuji**. generique: **Eurocitel**. Filmed with the Moviecam Camera System, equipment by **Moviecam**. Helmut Berger & Telly Savalas dressed by **Francesco Emalto**. Caroline Munro's clothes: **Isabelle Allard**. underwear by **Nuits Calnes**. Thanks to **M. Alain Stritsky** for the Le clic extract; **Protection et Transports Century** – **Marc Delachau**; **Clinique Labrouste**; **Clinique Medicale du Val De Seine**; **American Express**; **Hotel Concorde Lafayette**; **Pierre Declercq Fleures**; **Les Montres Vacheron Constantin**; **Francis Javitt**, Paris; **Metropolitan Mannequins** – **Societe Straport**; **Societe Elisabeth de Senneville**; **Funerarium De Vitry**. dedicated to **Midi-Minuit**.

Cast: **Helmut Berger** (Dr. Frank Flamand). **Brigitte Lahaie** (Nathalie). **Chris Mitchum** (Sam Morgan). **Telly Savalas** (Terry Hallen). **Stephane Audran** (Mme. Sherman). **Christiane Jean** (Ingrid Flamand). **Anton Diffring** (Dr. Karl Hans Moser). **Caroline Munro** (Barbara Hallen). **Howard Vernon** (Professor E. Orloff). **Tilda Thamar** (Mme. François). **Florence Guerin** (Florence Guerin). **Gerard Zalcborg** (Gordon). **Henri Poirier** (Commissaire Legris). **Laure Sabardin** (receptionist). **Amelie Chevalier** (Melissa). **Marcel Philippot** (Maxence). **Tony Awak** (Doudou). **Mony Dalmes** (Baroness). **Doris Thomas** (singer). **Daniel Beretta** (man from Bois du Boulogne). **Antonina Laurent** (Karen). **Isabelle Cnokaert** [sic] (Gina). **Jacques Couderc** (morgue employee). **Nicky Gorska** (acid-throwing woman). **Jean Tolzac** (hotel concierge). **Pasquale Vital** (barmaid). **Lina Romay** (Mme. Orloff). **Alain Barbier** (Rachid). **Thierry Foulques** (secretary). **Daniel Grimm** (Inspector Wallace).

Synopsis: Successful cosmetic surgeon Dr. Frank Flamand is Christmas shopping with his business partner Nathalie and sister Ingrid when a former patient, Mrs. Francois, throws acid at him in revenge for a botched operation. However, she misses Dr. Flamand and soaks Ingrid instead, causing horrendous burns to her entire face. Nathalie and Flamand decide to abduct and kill young women with a view to performing a face transplant. Nathalie selects Barbara Hallen, a model to whom she sells coke, drugging her and locking her in a cell in the basement of the clinic. Barbara is still wearing the immensely valuable watch she'd been

modelling moments before she was abducted. Nathalie keeps it for herself. A week later, in New York City, Barbara's father Terry Hallen hires a private detective, Sam Morgan, to go and find her. In search of advice about facial transplantation, Flamand and Nathalie visit the renowned surgeon Professor Orloff. Now a Catholic, Orloff tells them the only person who can successfully do the operation is Karl Moser, a one-time Nazi doctor who relishes working on living tissue. Back at the clinic, Nathalie discovers that her mute manservant, Gordon, has raped Barbara. More importantly, he has damaged her face in the process. Gordon is punished by being sent for S&M correction with the hideously scarred Ingrid. Morgan interviews Barbara's fashion photographer Maxence and roughs him up for information. He discovers that Barbara was wearing the valuable watch when she disappeared. Maxence's bodyguard Doudo attacks Morgan and forces him to flee, but not before Morgan kicks him in the balls. Flamand kidnaps another woman, Melissa, to use instead of Barbara, but keeps Barbara chained up in the basement waiting for her turn. Moser arrives, eager to begin the operation, but the process goes wrong and he destroys Melissa's face. Gordon chainsaws her to pieces and dumps her in the Seine. At a nightclub, Flamand and Nathalie seduce actress Florence Guerin and bring her to the clinic. Nathalie has been using Barbara's credit card, from which Morgan traces her whereabouts to Flamand's clinic. While interrogating Flamand, Morgan spots Nathalie wearing the missing watch. Gordon kills a nurse at the clinic who stumbles upon the incarcerated women in the basement. Later that evening, Moser successfully removes Florence's face and transplants it onto Ingrid. Morgan returns to the clinic and, after fighting off and killing Gordon, locates Barbara, only for Nathalie to creep up and lock them both in the cell. With bodies piling up and snooping authorities closing in, Flamand, Nathalie and Ingrid take Moser's advice and leave France, but not before they've walled up the cells, burying Barbara and Morgan alive...

Review: As the opening logo appears for French producer René Chateau, to the strains of Richard Strauss's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", one can't help but smile. Talk about your big build up! *Faceless* (or *Les prédateurs de la nuit* to use its more dignified title) is Jess Franco's most expensive horror film since *Jack the Ripper* in 1976, and his starriest cast since *The Bloody Judge* in 1969. That we cut from Richard Strauss to the George Michael-esque crooning of "Faceless", performed by Vincenzo Thoma, provides the first of many laughs; some, it must be said, completely intentional.

Faceless is not a comedy per se, but if Patsy from *Absolutely Fabulous* ever directed a horror film it would probably look like this. It's a glossy, nasty, sardonic update of *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, transplanting the story into a glitzy world of upscale Parisian nightclubs, coke-addled haute couturists, and expensive cosmetic surgery clinics. The result is a cartoon collision between Orloff, Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* and Robert Altman's *Prêt-à-Porter*, with added surgery and chainsaw murders. If that sounds irresistible (and why wouldn't it?), be assured that Franco delivers all the amusement the comparison suggests. For only the third time in his career (after *Jack the Ripper* and *Bloody Moon*) he employs

genuinely gruesome special effects; *Faceless* was made at the height of the pre-CGI prosthetics boom and Franco doesn't disappoint, delivering a chainsaw beheading (take that, *Pieces!*), a hypodermic needle to the eye (in your face, *Dead and Buried!*), a power-drill through the cranium (up yours, *Driller Killer!*), a maggot-infested severed head (move over, *Macabre!*), and the removal of an entire face which is then displayed to the horrified donor (don't slam the door on your way out, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2!*). There's even a neat 'scissors through the throat' scene reminiscent of *Bloody Moon*, and if a man can't plagiarise himself what's the world coming to?

As if this were not enough to be getting on with, *Faceless* peppers the mayhem with a delicious script that veers between the unintentionally camp ("I'll join you later... I'll be back to check if you still have that small butterfly tattooed on your left thigh...") and the knowingly outrageous (a Nazi doctor announcing that he can't sedate unwilling donors because "*The patients' fear and panic are the best muscular stimulants*"). When rich sleazeball Dr. Flamand ("*Finding a virgin in Paris these days is getting harder and harder...*") tells a young woman upon whom he once performed plastic surgery that she's "blossomed", she lasciviously strokes his crotch and says, "*By the looks of things, you're blossoming too.*" There's something deliriously garish and very funny about the slinky sexuality in *Faceless*; it's like a parody of those oafishly serious 'erotic dramas' Zalman King was cranking out in the late 1980s. Franco taps into the tacky, superficial crassness of eighties pop culture, in a film that's half indulgence of that tackiness and half ironic corruption of it. Amid the self-obsessed high-society ninnies around him, Flamand has no difficulty hiding his wickedness. His clinic is full of elderly women desperate to restore the appearance of youth, all coquettishly a-flutter when the unctuous 'miracle-worker' strolls their way. Barbed dialogue about the essential similarities between actresses, models, and hookers, sarcastic asides about actresses who desperately court publicity on their way up, only to hide behind 'I want to be alone' shades when they've made it, and lots of casual digs at female vanity, make this an uncommonly acerbic treatment of women for Franco, who more often indulges and celebrates his female characters (perhaps these sentiments come from René Chateau, who co-wrote the screenplay).

Once again Franco is telling the story of a man trying to restore the beauty of a disfigured woman, in this case his sister, but despite the déjà-vu there are plenty of changes to hold our attention. A significant advance on previous versions of the Orloff story is that the recipient of the grafts is a conscious, willing participant, with no qualms about the systematic destruction of her 'donors'. Instead of just another catatonic innocent being fussed over by a psychotic loved one, we have a story not only of obsessive, fascistic love, but obsessive fascistic vanity. It's one thing for a woman who's had acid thrown in her face to be angry and bitter and inclined to abuse her attractive sex partners in S&M grudge fits (that's probably how *I'd* react); it's quite another for her to gladly accept faces peeled from innocent victims in place of her own. Ingrid, like her brother and his decadent lover Nathalie, has that blithe sense of entitlement





TOP LEFT: Carl Moser (Anton Diffring) hard at work, with assistance from Nathalie (Brigitte Lahaie)
TOP RIGHT: Gordon (Gerard Zalcberg) deals with a snooping nurse who is hiding in a cupboard
BOTTOM: "Look how beautiful she's going to be" – Moser shows Florence (Florence Guerin) what she's losing

that comes with permanent wealth, so as far as she's concerned it's too bad for these mutilated hookers and models, who cheapen their gift of beauty anyway. Better that it belongs to a woman of culture and sophistication!

"I can't operate on her; the only person who can help is... Professor Orloff." So says the out-of-his depth Dr. Flamand as we head for the film's dramatic core, beginning with a visit to Professor Orloff himself. For long-time Franco fans, the scene is bitter-sweet: bitter, because it's too short, no more than five minutes; sweet, because it gives the incomparable Howard Vernon one last bask in the spotlight of a Franco film, and he plays it beautifully. Orloff's wife opens the door and we see that it's Lina Romy, almost unrecognisable in old age make-up. She shows Nathalie and Flamand into the study, where Orloff kneels in prayer before a rosary-garlanded crucifix. Franco wittily shows his favourite monster clinging to the hem of the Catholic faith, a relationship that is mocked in later dialogue exchanges. It turns out that Orloff can't help Flamand directly: after baiting the conversation with a casual reference to his work for the Nazis ("I once observed a total face graft, but that was in Germany, during the war"), Orloff recommends the surgeon who performed that operation, a man whose lack of scruples makes even Orloff look angelic: "After the defeat of the Nazis he managed to escape to Switzerland with the help of some religious organisation. He was sentenced to death in absentia at Nuremberg, for experimenting on living human beings. He changed his name, and nationality, and now lives, as free as a bird, in Spain. His name is Karl Moser." But will Moser come out of retirement? Orloff is optimistic: "If you offer him a lot of money, a new passport allowing him to return to Austria, and last but not least, the possibility to experiment on human beings again, why not?"

Moser, played with exquisite understatement by Anton Diffring, arrives at Flamand's chateau soon after, in a scene which parodies *The Exorcist* (a sinister man arriving on the doorstep at night to offer his professional assistance to a troubled female). Earlier, Orloff claimed to have been Moser's prisoner during the war. However, over dinner with Flamand, Moser undercuts both Orloff's piety and his claims to having been coerced: "It was in Dachau that I met Orloff. With him I pursued my experiments, in order to show Mengele, and all the other upstart doctors in the Nazi Party, that I was the best. [Orloff] wasn't a mystic then. He can play the wise man and the devout today. Without the experience he obtained at my side, he would never have become 'the great Professor Orloff'. But he was lacking something. He was afraid to operate on living flesh."

Faceless has trundled along quite merrily so far, as a medical slasher film with a healthy dose of camp, but here, in the central portion of the film, shadows gather and the meat tastes stronger. Amorality is a constant in Franco's stories; his obsession with De Sade ensures that cruel pitiless characters are at play throughout his filmography. Yet *Faceless* is the first film in which Franco explicitly refers to Nazi Germany. We've had Latin-American fascists many times before, which makes sense, of course, from a director who lived under General Franco's regime. Now we learn that Franco's

favourite ghoul, Dr. Orloff, worked in Dachau with the SS, which adds another layer to the character, one that modernises him far more effectively than such misfires as 1973's *Los ojos del doctor Orloff* or 1982's *El siniestro doctor Orloff*. And Franco does not simply moralise when confronting the spectre of Nazi horror; he treats his visiting Nazi ghoul as though a deadly spider has entered the room, to be kept at a distance but watched intently, and treated with the respect one reserves for the truly dangerous. He allows us to observe this man without crowding us with authorial disapproval. Details accrue as we watch and listen, conveyed with such delicacy, compared to the rest of the garish narrative, that it's almost a film within a film: we note Moser's arrogance and lack of conscience ("You know, I always believed in myself"); his sexism (when Flamand's lover Nathalie greets him at the door, he speaks to her as if she's the maidservant); his lack of interest in social niceties (interrupting Flamand's Gallic introductions with a demand that they proceed immediately to the patient); his classical acculturation (recognising at a glance the paintings in Flamand's study by Corot and Degas). We also see Moser's prickly ego and enjoyment of one-upmanship: noticing a flicker of startlement from Nathalie when he mentions experimenting on living humans, he goadingly remarks, "The French are a strange people. You are very sentimental over trivial things; on the one hand you protect the baby seals... and on the other, France, the country of human rights, has become the third largest arms dealer in the world, behind Russia and the United States." Most chillingly of all, when the first transplant operation goes wrong, he begins slicing at the unfortunate donor with the scalpel, ripping her face up in annoyance, muttering "Scheisse... scheisse!", like an artist petulantly scribbling out an errant brushstroke. His demeanour even suggests the horrible possibility that he deliberately messed up this operation in order to have the opportunity to perform another. The coup de grâce comes when he shows a bound and helpless woman the face that he's just peeled from her skull and, referring to the soon-to-be recipient, says, "Look how beautiful she's going to be", as the victim's eyes goggle helplessly in a sea of red mush. It's a moment of pure sadism, conveyed, as is all of Moser's dialogue, in the calm, faintly amused tones of an epicurean of suffering. It makes you wish that Diffring could have played Hannibal Lecter instead of hammy old Anthony Hopkins...

Throughout *Faceless*, ironies both cruel and casual accumulate, with Franco in complete control of the subtleties: if retarded handyman Gordon had not raped and beaten Barbara, she would have been the first recipient of Moser's face-ripping attentions; Moser, an amoral psychopath, gives his French hosts a cogent lecture on France's multi-billion franc arms industry; the reference to Moser being helped out of Switzerland by 'some religious organisation' alludes to the Catholic Church's connivance with the Nazis (bedding Orloff's Catholicism more thoroughly into the story, and, with his evasiveness about the name of that 'religious organisation', giving evidence of his moral cowardice); finally, there's a very real likelihood that despite Morgan's phone call for help, Barbara's father will be too late to save his daughter. Why?



TOP: Nathalie (Brigitte Lahaie) gets rid of an insensitive gigolo (Daniel Beretta) who insists of removing Ingrid's mask during sex.
 BOTTOM LEFT: A desperate 'patient' imprisoned in Dr. Flamand's basement tries to overpower Nathalie, until Gordon's machete intervenes.
 BOTTOM RIGHT: Mrs. Sherman (Stephane Audran) pays the price for snooping into the clinic's secrets.

Because it's Christmas! He's not been to the office to check his answerphone messages. Franco stages the aftermath of Moser's second operation – a success this time – with sweet music, grateful smiles all round, and soft-focus daylight streaming through the French windows. “*The scars have healed in fifteen days,*” smiles the Nazi, as Ingrid's new face glows with health and vitality. Nathalie and Flamand look on with elegant awe as Diffing delivers the film's killer punch-line: “*Deep down, I'm a real sentimentalist*”. He plays it through his cold blue-grey eyes with not a flicker of a smile; like a shark making a joke. For my money Anton Diffing gives the single best performance by a male actor in a Jess Franco film. *Faceless* ultimately shares more than a little blood with its chief monster. Beneath its glossy, gaudy surface – all posh houses, expensive jewellery, and chic Paris boutiques – there's a grin that has more in common with a skull than the softness of human lips.

Cast and crew: *Faceless* features one of the starriest casts of Franco's career. Sadly, Anton Diffing's memorable performance as Moser was almost his last; he died aged seventy on the 20th May 1989, having followed *Faceless* with two more parts: a role in the *Doctor Who* serial “Silver Nemesis”, filmed in June and July of 1988, and another in Frank Strecker's film adaptation of a romantic TV series, *Anna*, shot between August and October 1988 ... Apparently, the role of Dr. Orloff – just a short scene in the finished film – was something Franco desperately wanted to expand, intending to make his venerable old monster the unlikely saviour of the female lead. René Chateau didn't agree, and what could have been a fond farewell to a signature character remains just a brief but poignant wave of the hand ... Telly Savalas, whose previous work in the horror genre included Mario Bava's sublime *Lisa and the Devil* and Eugenio Martín's loopy but exciting *Horror Express* back in 1972, may have little to do except yell at Chris Mitchum and deliver some telephone acting, but it's a pleasure to see him again ... Helmut Berger, Visconti's favourite actor and no stranger to kinky horror (Massimo Dallamano's *Dorian Gray*; Tinto Brass's *Salon Kitty*) brings Franco the benefit of his expertise, ably fleshing out the blandly wicked and humourless Dr. Flamand ... Stéphane Audran, BAFTA award-winning star of *Le Boucher* and *Babette's Feast*, brings neurotic edginess to her brief but memorable role as Mrs. Sherman, the patient whose paranoid suspicions result in the aforementioned ocular trauma (I must say, Flamand would make a lousy poker player; he all but admits there's something dodgy going on as soon as Mrs. Sherman starts insinuating). Meanwhile, on the B-list there's the ever-dependable Caroline Munro, notching up another gore film after her appearances in *Maniac* and *Slaughter High*, while Chris Mitchum and Brigitte Lahaie are held over from *Dark Mission*. Mitchum is as awkward and unconvincing as ever, but Lahaie is mostly excellent: I especially enjoyed her taunting Morgan when she locks him in with Barbara. Elsewhere, though, she's perhaps a little too broad. The way she nods and smiles as Orloff gives the lowdown on Moser, it's as if he's discussing arrangements for a garden fête, not the credentials of a Nazi butcher. However, while it's arguably overplayed, we're intended

to read it as a sign of her total amorality, as borne out later when she flirts with Moser before the second operation. “*You're amazing, Doctor. And so different...*”, she coos. Like, wow, it's not every day a girl gets to watch a Dachau surgeon at work!

Music: With songs by Romano Musumarra, sung by Italian crooner Vincenzo Thoma, the music in *Faceless* has that phony dusting of wealth, class and style which artists like Duran Duran and ABC counterfeited from earlier genuine-article stars like Bryan Ferry and David Bowie. The title number (altogether now: “*Destination nowhere!*”) sounds like a rejected backing track from Ferry's *Boys and Girls* album with a George Michael wannabe wailing over the top. By the way, to seal the comparison, Vincenzo Thoma's 2011 album *Romantico* features an Italian-language cover of “Careless Whisper”. So nice.

Locations: Paris.

Connections: Bogart, Maigret and Clouseau are referenced, in dialogue that self-consciously note the clichés of the story's detective subplot.

Other versions: Although there are no true variants of *Faceless* (*Predateurs de la nuit* is essentially the same cut) I'd just like to take some time to complain about that awful, awful export title. Calling your movie *Faceless* is just begging for critics to snicker about ‘one word reviews’ or ‘films that review themselves’. What was René Chateau thinking? Wouldn't ‘The Face Stealers’ have struck a better note? Surely ‘Your Face or Mine’ strikes the right balance between surgery and sex? How about ‘Why the Wrong Face’? Anything but *Faceless*!

ESMERALDA BAY

(original French title/English-language title)

Spain & France, 1988

depósito legal no: B-18924-1990

French visa No: 68097

Original titles in countries of origin

La bahía esmeralda (SP)

Esmeralda Bay (FR)

Alternative titles

Baía Esmeralda (POR video)

Countdown to Esmeralda Bay (USA video)

Karibian kapinalliset (FIN video) *Caribbean Rebels*

Επιχείρηση: Εσμεραλντα (GRE video) *Enterprise: Esmeralda*

Production companies

Eurociné (Paris)

Lluria Films S.L. (Barcelona)

*Theatrical distributors****United International Pictures** (Spain)**Les Films de l'Astre** (France)*Timeline*

Shooting date	circa summer	1988
Ready for screening at MIFED	October	1988

Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
France	Unknown

DVD running time (converted)

SP 'Filmax' PAL DVD	108m51s
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* Although picked up for distribution in Spain by United International Pictures, the film appears not to have been released theatrically in Madrid, Barcelona or Seville, nor does there appear to have been a French theatrical release.

director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.L. Mariaux'], **H.L. Rostaine**, **Jess Franco**. music: **Luis Enriquez Bacalov**; publisher General Music. director of photography: **Henry Frogers**. camera assistants: **Enrique López Quesada** [as 'Henry L. Quesada'], **Peter Radek**. first assistant director: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.L. Mariaux']. continuity: **Ilona Kunesova**. production managers: **Daniel Lesoeur** [as 'Dan Simon'], **Anthony Jover**. production coordinator: **Anthony Mayans**. production managers: **Antonio Mayans**, **Xavier Baste**, **Enrique Vila**, **Ángel Mora**, **Cristobal Fontanellas**, **Javier Pedro**, **Marina Verges**. editor: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosy Almirall']. make-up: **Manuela Moreno** [ENG 'Manu Moreen'], **Lydia Kelaidjan**. tailoring: **Daniel Katz**. sound recordist: **Licio Marcos Ferreira** [ENG: 'L. Marc Oliviera']. recorded in Ultra-Stereo. special effects: **Tony Hervans**, **Tom Annoux**. electricians [grips in ENG version]: **Poli Ramiro**, **Andres Moral**. electrical equipment: **Golden Sun**. special effects: **Félix Sepúlveda** [as 'Felix R. de Sepulvedaca']. stunt coordinator: **Doug Morries**. weapons: **Roasa**. the songs "My Heart Knows" (lyrics by **A. Perel**, music by **Captain Click**), "Hard So Hard" (lyrics by **F. Astain**, music by **J. Jampol**, **R. Zanelli**), and "Stay" (lyrics by **Y. Jones**, music by **M. Rosemond**) are performed by **Maxine Nightingale**. spiritual music: **Daniel White**. guitar solos: **Luis Alborado**. colour by **L.T.C.**. special thanks to **Canon**. *Uncredited*: executive producers: **Anthony Jover**, **Daniel Lesoeur**. producers: **Marius Lesoeur**, **Enrique Cerezo**. co-editor: **Jesus Franco**. colour: **Agrafacolor**. Widescreen.

Cast: **Ramon Estevez** [as 'Ramon Sheen'] (Andréas). **Robert Forster** (Colonel Madero). **Fernando Rey** (President Ramos). **George Kennedy** (Miklos Wilson). **Silvia Tortosa Davis** (Linda Wilson, Miklos's second wife). **Teri Vallee** (Anita Wilson, Miklos's

daughter). **Craig Hill** (Agent John Perry). **Brett Halsey** (Luis). **Daniel Grimm** [as 'Harrison Grimm'] (Antonio, Mr. Wilson's secretary). **Noel J. Sampson** (Perry's boss in Washington). **David Fulton** (bearded Naval Captain). **Jean-Pierre Delamour** (Naval Captain's 2nd in Command). **Lina Romay** (Loletta, brothel madam). **Antonio Mayans** (rebels' priest). **Piper. Karin Well** [as 'Karin Weill'] (President's secretary). **Edgardo Hernán** [as 'Ed Herman']. **Emilio Lisbona**. **Robert Long** (Head of the Presidential Guard). **Jess Franco** (the Sirena captain).

Synopsis: *The fictional Latin-American country of Puerto Santo is falling into civil war. President Ramos is weak and cannot control the situation. The ruthless Colonel Madero, head of the National Guard, who actually runs the country, welcomes the opportunity to foment discord, after which he plans to step in as dictator. Rebellion against the corrupt regime is being supported through gun-running; meanwhile, developments are being scrutinised by the American government, who are concerned about a possible opening for communism in the region. An American, Miklos Wilson, one of the wealthiest businessmen in Puerto Santo, supplies weapons to the guerrillas. Unbeknownst to him, however, his beautiful wife, Linda, is having an affair with Colonel Madero. She knows all the details of her husband's business and betrays him. The rebels wrongly suspect that the traitor is La Motte, an important member of the government. They mount a daring raid, attempting to kidnap him outside his Ministry; however a sniper, CIA agent John Perry, shoots La Motte in the back as he's being shepherded to a waiting van. Against the wishes of President Ramos, Colonel Madero orders a cruel and bloody retaliation against the people. Anita, the daughter of Wilson's first marriage, is in love with Andréas, a young guerrilla leader. She suspects Linda is the true culprit, and convinces her father to put to it the test. Wilson mentions, in front of Linda, that the next arms shipment will come ashore at Esmeralda Bay, when in fact it is set to happen further up the coast. Linda's guilt is proven when Wilson and the rebels see Colonel Madero's men waiting at Esmeralda Bay. When Linda realises that her treachery has been exposed she takes refuge on the outskirts of the capital in a casino run by an ex-lover of Colonel Madero. Madero abducts Wilson's daughter and holds her in Puerto Santo's police dungeons. Meanwhile, Perry, assigned by Washington as an agitator in the area with a dispensation to use any method to ensure the outcome favoured by the USA, advises Washington that it is time to intervene. He ensures that the rebels' attempt to rescue Anita from Madero's base ends in bloodshed, in order to discredit the rebels, who are suspected to be communists, and justify American involvement in propping up the Ramos administration. An American naval fleet on manoeuvres in the Caribbean is ordered to disembark in Puerto Santo to help to President Ramos and his troops... Treachery, confrontation and much fighting ensue before the villainous Madero is beaten. Anita is reunited with her father, and order is restored to Puerto Santo. But with whom will Anita choose to spend the rest of her life; her arms-dealing father, or the handsome young rebel Andréas?*

Review: A tale of gun-runners, attempted military coups and international chicanery surrounding the fortunes of a fictional

South American state, *Esmeralda Bay* is the closest Jess Franco ever got to a full-on political drama, although it's ultimately just an action film with a few sardonic political asides.

Beginning with a whopping ten minutes of day-for-night footage, shot with a heavy blue filter, *Esmeralda Bay* does little to welcome the casual viewer. This is a shame, because once the story gets moving it has some decent qualities, thanks to a great cast and a bracingly cynical attitude towards the various warring parties, military, civilian and political. In keeping with Franco's loosely progressive left-leaning politics, the freedom fighters are conveyed sympathetically, even sentimentally, but at least this means we can be sure, in a story full of treachery and a production full of compromise, where Franco's true sympathies lie. If it weren't for this, we might begin to wonder. At one point, a hard-bitten CIA operative (a wonderfully malevolent Craig Hill) tells the guerrillas that they're innocents who need to keep their heads down and let the 'big guns' get on with it, and it's true, the rebels *are* innocents, thrust into battle against forces mightier and more vicious than they are – which is *not* to say he's right about the need for them to leave the struggle to the Americans! Viewed seriously, this is the crux of the film's problem. *Esmeralda Bay* tries to have its cake and eat it, depicting a noble guerrilla struggle against repression, hemmed in on all sides by competing military and political forces, home-grown and international: yet, for all the film's sharp-eyed scepticism about US military involvement in South American politics (an American political attaché murmurs "*We don't want another Nicaragua on our hands*", and keeps referring to the President of Puerto Santos as 'Marcos' instead of Ramos), these very forces roll up and save the day in the end. Perhaps this was a by-product of the casting of several American B-movie legends in the movie? The script has to roll out the welcome mat to the American actors (and American buyers, presumably) while also satisfying the rest of the film's anticipated international audience. Franco ensures there is some irony and ambivalence along the way, although the final caption indicating that the Americans sailed away after securing President Ramos's political survival may provoke a few snorts of derision when one recalls events like the CIA-organised coup d'état in Guatemala. However *Esmeralda Bay* does not stint on showing the CIA's cynical manipulation of events, with Major Perry committing cold-blooded murder in order to discredit what were meant to be bloodless acts of resistance, a strategy that echoes various covert and/or military 'adventures' in Cuba in 1961, the Dominican Republic in 1963, Brazil in 1964, and Chile in 1973. The result is slightly schizophrenic, compromised even: but hey, that's politics, right?

Technically, *Esmeralda Bay* is a tightly controlled professional product. At times we're even treated to the dizzying and pleasurable sensation of smooth, gliding tracking shots from a well-handled camera dolly. The acting, with the exception of dreary Terri Vallee as Anita Wilson, is conventionally efficient and capable. The only let-down is the script, which is simply workmanlike and, whether through writing failure or lack of time and money, tends to

squander the potential of key moments. For instance, when the rebels attack the fortress of Colonel Madero, their attack is timed to coincide with Madero announcing his intended military coup, so when the missiles hit the building we really ought to see his face, and the faces of the assembled political warmongers. Instead, we cut away, and Madero and his goons run down some stairs in long shot, *after* the blast. Thus a powerful dramatic jolt is lost.

For all the film's political subject-matter, what this really boils down to is a bunch of guys playing at soldiers, intercut with stock footage of military operations. In the last twenty minutes, when the real drama is with the politicians and generals, we're subjected to endless shots of trundling hardware, as if Franco and his producers are afraid we'll find the machinations of human beings less interesting than a cut-and-paste montage of wham-bam gunfights and grainy military training films. Fernando Rey gives his portrayal of President Ramos real gravity, Craig Hill and Robert Forster are delivering relishable morsels of evil, but someone somewhere decided that what we *really* want from the climax of this picture is ten thousand tons of military metalwork blundering around in stock-footage purgatory.

Franco on screen: Franco plays the captain of a boat delivering arms to the rebels.

Cast and crew: The real pleasure of *Esmeralda Bay* lies with its cast, a veritable flotilla of B-movie stalwarts. There's George Kennedy, star of myriad 1960s American TV shows who became the go-to man for stoic disaster movie heroes (playing Joe Patroni in *Airport*, *Airport 75*, *Airport 77* and *The Concorde... Airport '79*) before delightfully sending up his screen persona with the *Naked Gun* films (the first of which was made the same year as *Esmeralda Bay*). Here he wears a zip-up car coat throughout the film and looks as though he's just stepped before the camera after a few rounds on an especially blustery golf course. 'Solid and dependable' is pretty much all he offers, but the script doesn't require much else ("*I'm a businessman! Some people sell shoes, I sell arms.*"). Then there's Brett Halsey, in a curiously underwritten role as Luis, one of the rebels. Like Kennedy, Halsey's a veteran of American TV, but his career took a different path when he decamped to Italy during the 1960s and surfed the waves of spy, sword-and-sandal and Spaghetti Western movies, with roles for Riccardo Freda (*Le sette spade del vendicatore*, 1962), Tonino Cervi (*Oggi a me... domani a te!*, 1968) and Mario Bava (*Roy Colt & Winchester Jack*, 1970). After returning to the USA for over a decade, Halsey went back to European productions in the 1980s. He worked three times with Italian horror maestro Lucio Fulci, beginning with a downbeat erotic thriller, *The Devil's Honey* (1986), followed by an over-the-top performance in the gory *Quando Alice rompe lo specchio* aka *Touch of Death* and a slightly less bizarre turn in the 'nunsploitation' opus *Demonia* (1990). Fernando Rey gives gentle pathos to the out-of-his-depth President Ramos; he's especially good in the scene where he's asked by Antonio Mayans' rebel priest to leave a memorial service for the fallen of his country: "*You think you actually know me?*" he says, stung by the snub, but then leaves,

tacitly acknowledging the emptiness of his protests. Best known for his work with Luis Bunuel (*Viridiana*, *Tristana*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *That Obscure Object of Desire*) Rey had appeared in Franco's 1966 spy romp *Cartas boca arriba* and the Franco-scripted *Espionage in Lisbon* (1965) alongside Brett Halsey. Craig Hill, star of innumerable Spaghetti Westerns (Tonino Valerii's *Per il gusto di uccidere*, Mario Caiano's *Sette pistole per un massacro*, Nunzio Malasomma's *Quindici forche per un assassino*, Paolo Moffa's *All'ultimo sangue*, Sergio Garrone's *Tre croci per non morire*, Mario Gariazzo's *Il giorno del giudizio*, and many more) is great as the ambiguous American Major Perry, bringing a grizzled, gimlet-eyed hawkishness to his role (he'd have made a great Donald Rumsfeld if anyone had ever shot an exploitation film about the run-up to the Allied invasion of Iraq!). But best of all is Robert Forster, who makes the repellent and despicable Colonel Madero so much fun to watch it's positively criminal. Whether getting in the mood for his forthcoming military coup by miming machine gun fire through the presidential windows, smoochily seducing the rich bitch wife of arms dealer George Kennedy or bullying the ineffectual President, he's magnetic and witty and sexy; characteristics rarely allowed to co-exist in a male role in a Franco film! Forster's presence in the film gave Antonio Mayans, usually billed as 'Robert Foster' in Franco's films, an embarrassing moment, as Forster himself recalled in an interview with Will Harris in 2001: "*There was an actor in Spain, and when I started out, people told him that he looked like me, so he did a number of movies using the name 'Robert Forster'. Which, you know, apparently you can do over there. Not here. The Screen Actors Guild won't let you do that. But over there, they did it [...]. And I worked with this guy in a movie! He came over to me and sheepishly told me the story that I just told you, that they told him that he looked like me, so he made some movies calling himself Robert Forster. Nice guy, though. [Laughs.]*"¹

Music: *Esmeralda Bay*'s brisk Morricone-esque score is by Luis Bacalov, who went on to win the Oscar for best score for his work on Michael Radford's *Il postino: The Postman* (1996). He'd previously worked for Pasolini (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*), Sergio Corbucci (*Django*), Damiano Damiani (*A Bullet for the General*), Federico Fellini (*City of Women*) and scored a string of movies for Italian crime movie specialist Fernando di Leo (*Milano calibro 9*, *Il boss*, *Il poliziotto è marcio*, *Colpo in canna* and others). His music for Giancarlo Santi's Spaghetti Western *Il grande duello* (1972) and Antonio Isasi-Isasmendi's Spanish crime thriller *Un verano para matar* (1972) were used by Quentin Tarantino on the soundtracks to *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* and *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* respectively.

Locations: Barcelona and Tarragona, Spain.

Connections: President Ramos, reflecting on life before being threatened at gunpoint by Madero, quotes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 4), in which the Price of Denmark considers how one small flaw in a man's character may come to determine his legacy: "*Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect, being nature's livery or fortune's star, their virtues else (be they as pure as grace, as infinite as man may undergo) shall in the general censure take corruption from that*

particular fault." ... Shakespeare is referenced again when the US presidential aide refers to 'General Monte' (sic) "*who I hear is trying to organise a putsch with the other Cordelias around*" – Cordelia being the daughter of King Lear, banished from his side, who returns at the end of the play to find him mad ... The recurring Franco character of a blind musician, playing guitar as characters plot and scheme in his presence, pops up again ... The fictional location of Puerto Santo refers back to the seaside setting of Franco's *Downtown* (1976) ... *La bahia de las esmeraldas* was the Spanish title for *The Moon-Spinners* (1964), a Walt Disney production starring Hayley Mills.

FALL OF THE EAGLES

(English-language export title)

France 1989

Original theatrical title in country of origin

La chute des aigles (FR) *Fall of the Eagles*

Alternative titles

Una canción por Berlin (SP video) *A Song for Berlin*

Lilly Fille à Soldats (shooting title) *Lilly: A Girl for the Soldiers*

Lili, une chanson pour Berlin (shooting title)

Lili, a Song for Berlin

War Song (alt. shooting title)

War Songs (title reported in *Variety*)

Lily, a Song for Berlin (proposed export title reported in *Variety*)

Pád Orlú (CZ DVD) *Eagles Fall*

Missão Águia – O Último Ataque (BRA video)

Mission Eagle – The Last Attack

Production company

Eurociné (Paris)

Theatrical distributor

Les Films de l'Astre *

Timeline

Shooting date	circa February	1989
Cannes Film Market screening	18 May	1989
Copyright		1990

* Although Les Films de l'Astre picked up the film for French theatrical distribution, it seems they released it straight to video.

DVD running time (converted)

FR 'Films De L'Astre' PAL DVD	87m53s
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director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.M. Frank']. adaptation: **Jess Franco**, **Georges Friedland** [as 'George Freedland']. screenplay: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.M. Frank'], **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khune']. music: **Daniel J. White**. executive producer: **Marius Lesoeur**. associate producer: **Ilona Kunesova**. producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. artistic director: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.M. Frank']. director of photography: **Jean-Jacques Bouhon** [as 'J.J. Bouhon']. editor: **Jess Franco** [as 'J.P. Johnson']. assistant editor: **John Heigh**. production designer: **Jill Barbra**. art director: **William Lighty**. set director: **Didier Burgaux**. production manager: **Daniel Lesoeur** [as 'Dan Simon']. unit production manager: **Ann Mirapeux**. 1st assistant director: **Dolph Oullin**. 2nd assistant director: **Nathalie Baehrel**. script supervisor: **Veronica Bastid**. still photographer: **Lonka Domaz**. sound engineer: **Michael Brethez**. make-up/hair supervisors: **Manu Morren**, **Lydia Kalaydjian**. costume designer: **Janine Gonzales**. assistant wardrobe: **Joelle Mennequin**. best boy electrical: **Charlie Marzolf**. electricians: **Alan Gaebler**, **Wilson Marcus**. key grip/dolly: **Milo Balin**. best boy grip: **John Scott**. special effects produced by **Sois Company**. effects crew: **Peter Radek**, **Tom Annouk**. dialogue coach: **Daniel Grimm**. 2nd unit director: **Marius Lesoeur** [as 'A.M. Frank']. 2nd unit camera: **Henry Frogers**. 2nd unit assistant director: **J. Christopher Porte**. 2nd unit sound engineer: **Dominique Davy**. casting: **Claire Newell**. stunt coordinators: **Doug Morries**, **Willis Sutliff**. stunt players: **Mike Nourris**, **Steve Goulak**. vehicles: **Patrick Chamourat**. weapons adviser: **Regi Flynn**. property master: **Arnould Delmotte**. technical historical consultant: **Otto Volhen**. transportation captain: **John Louis Fiaux**. catering: **Marinette Service**. executive in charge of production: **Sharyon Reis Cobe**. post-production supervisor: **Eric Lardy**. sound design: **E.L.M.T.**. recordist/mixer: **Claude Martenot**. sound effects recordist: **Varlie Abrial**, **Bruno Winsdown**. foley artist: **S. Mutela**. A.D.R. director: **Alan Braun**. post-production sound by **Sun Studio**; **Couleur Studio**. recorded in Ultra-Stereo. Ultra Stereo consultant: **James Puig**. Songs: "Ein, Zwei, Drei, Lili..." lyrics by **Amadeus**, music composer: **Daniel J. White**, performed by **Alexandra Erlich**; "Don't Close Your Eyes" lyrics by **Jess Franco** [as 'Cliff Brown'], music composer: **Daniel J. White**, performed by **Alexandra Erlich**; "When Love Dies" lyrics by **Octave Cremieux**, music composer: **George Millandy**, performed by **Alexandra Erlich**. negative cutter: **Frank Editorial**. colour timer: **Pascal Massoneau**. laboratories: **Telcipro**; **FotoKem**. prerecorded footage supplied by **Les Company** (all rights reserved). titles and opticals by **Ercidan**. camera and lenses provided by **Chevereau**.

Cast: **Christopher Lee** (Walter Strauss). **Ramon Estevez** [as 'Ramon Sheen'] (Karl Holbach). **Mark Hamill** (Peter Froelich). **Alexandra Erlich** (Lillian 'Lilli' Strauss). **Daniel Grimm** [as 'Harrison Grimm'] (Captain Anton). **Carole Keeper** (Johanna

Menz). **Craig Hill** (Major Holbach). **Teresa Gimpera** (Lena). **Teri Vallee** [as 'Terri Vallee'] (Rosa). **Carlos Quiroga** (Dimitri). **Laurence Lamaire** (Ingrid). **Robert Ground** (Gestapo Chief). **Anthony Mayans** (Hans Gruningen). **Jack Potin** (Rudy). **Steph Angelier** (Otto Hemming). **Peter Cheremetieff** (Desert Officer). **Yann Deschelles** (American soldier). **Christine Ronsin** (nurse). Uncredited: **Daniel J. White** (pianist).

Synopsis: *Berlin. Lilli is a singer, and her current boyfriend, Karl, is a pianist and composer. A Nazi officer friend, Peter Froelich, adores Lilli from a distance. Karl hates the Nazis, but he's conscripted and must go to war anyway. While he's away, Lilli offers her services to the Reich as a singer, partially to get away from her stiff, old-fashioned father, Walter, who disapproves of her relationship with Karl. Karl is sent into combat in North Africa, where, when listening to Lillian on the radio, he is injured during a mortar skirmish. Lilli has a fling with Peter, and when he's mortally injured she proposes marriage. The two are wed at Peter's bedside, but he dies just minutes later. On her way to the Eastern front, Lillian and her friends, Rosa and Ingrid, are caught in partisan gunfire. Anton, a Nazi captain and secret homosexual, looks after them. Back in Berlin, Walter deliberately withholds Karl's letters from his daughter. On the Russian border, Lilli and her friends stop off in a Russian tavern, where they stay for a while and make friends with a young local man, Dimitri. Unbeknownst to the German visitors, Dimitri is a partisan. He plants a bomb, but saves Lilli. Ingrid and Anton are blown up. Walter begins to see the reality of the war when his old friend Major Holbach arrives with one arm missing, blown off in the steadily worsening conflict. He turns to a local woman, an innkeeper, for friendship, but she's exposed as a Jew and taken away by the Gestapo. Karl and Lilli are reunited at the Eastern front, and as 1945 turns to victory for the Allies, make a run for it through the countryside, where they encounter a friendly American soldier. But then a bullet whizzes through the trees...*

Review: Watched after such low points as *La esclava blanca* or *El ojete de Luli*, Franco's expensive Eurociné productions of the late 1980s come as blessed relief. *Fall of the Eagles*, however, is by far the weakest. A straight-faced, soapish drama about life in Nazi Germany, played by a bizarre mixture of American, British and Spanish stars, it's an unfortunate 'Europudding' production, chasing the coat-tails of a brand of cinema already on its way out. To make matters worse, no one involved in the making of the film has the faintest idea how to convey the enormity of the historic nightmare being depicted. As for the care and attention to detail that might have made this work, you swiftly get a feel for what's to come as you try to make grammatical sense of the opening voice-over: "The Nazi army having crushed Poland, Adolf Hitler, triumphant dictator, is going to train his unrestrained bloodlust on the rest of Europe and the greatest slaughter in history, Hell let loose on Earth by one man's mad ambition." And yes, that's verbatim.

So what went wrong? Well, let's start with the fact that the story is told in English, with no German actors and not even a German accent. Of course it's all too easy for German accented dialogue from non-German actors to descend into kitsch absurdity – 'Vee have vays off making you tok' – but the alternative is just as unappealing; decent Germans Mark 'Skywalker' Hamill and Ramon 'not Emilio' Estevez sound as wholesome and All-American as you please, while rich Nazi sympathiser Christopher Lee is pure English Gentleman's Club, with a plum in his mouth throughout. Note that the Americans play the 'good Nazis' leaving the bad guy role to the Brit – did no one involved recall that the British actually *fought* the Nazis? Filling out the cast, there's an American-born ex-pat Spaghetti Western star (Craig Hill), a noted Spanish character actress (Teresa Gimpera, Hill's real life spouse), a handsome young Spaniard playing a Russian partisan (Carlos Quiroga, previously seen in *Phollastia*), and sundry other roles filled by minor French actors. Amid the plethora of accents and physiognomies, Germans are conspicuous by their absence. Even obscure starlet Alexandra Ehrlich, who plays the pivotal role of Lilli, sounds French.

Faced with the inherent dramatic potential of the subject, *Fall of the Eagles* promptly marches off in the least promising direction, the war romance. Thus, what was arguably the most terrible and dramatic conflict of the 20th century is reduced to a backdrop for sentimentality. If the film were intent on causing shock and outrage, like the tasteless 'Nazisploitation' films that slithered out of Italy in the 1970s, it would still be preferable to this flavourless porridge, skirting around the horrors for the sake of cheap schmaltz. The film wants to be a 'serious drama', but it lacks the balls to really go for it. Instead it offers platitudes about the horrors of war which attempt humanist profundity but end up sounding moronic. "*But Walter, no one wins wars; everyone loses,*" protests one sensitive soul when Walter Strauss, devoted admirer of the Reich, cheers the Nazi war effort. The script, credited to Marius Lesoeur, Jess Franco and Georges Friedland (director of 1975's *Une vierge pour St. Tropez*), has not the slightest notion of how to present the complexities of wartime, nor even of how to avoid necessary simplifications sounding stupid. I suppose that by showing a Russian partisan blowing up a building full of Germans whom he has 'befriended', Franco tries to show the way that war demands actions of the oppressed that mirror the savagery of the oppressors, and in this, at least, he succeeds. The rest, however, is just a would-be tear-jerker that treats the war as a setting for a lachrymose love triangle, with some exciting rat-a-tat gun battles thrown in for the boys. The Final Solution is dealt with in one brief scene, in which a Jewish barmaid is led away by a Gestapo officer. "*Get your coat and your bag,*" she's told. The script can't even get *that* right; perhaps this ever-so-patient Gestapo officer could let her straighten her hair and make-up too? Meanwhile, attempts at poignancy are undermined by a total lack of grit: when a German officer with whom Strauss has played billiards throughout the film turns up in the games room with one

arm missing, the moment is supposed to be heavy with emotion. Instead I found myself giggling – if only Strauss had just blinked and said 'Shall I break?'

Technically, *Fall of the Eagles* plays the game according to mainstream rules of engagement, that's to say it doesn't have any of the rough edges that we associate with Franco's cinema. It's meant to look like a 'proper' drama, and it does. No one is going to cry foul here on the basis of a dodgy zoom or an out-of-focus hand-held shot. There are scenes in which the photography is quite elegant, and Christopher Lee is giving a good, well-focussed and appropriately restrained performance. In fact, it's Lee who keeps you watching; if this turned up on some cable channel on a Sunday afternoon, and you had nothing else to do but nurse a hangover and watch TV, you would end up enjoying his contribution. It's just a pity that, with everyone trying to take things seriously, the script has nothing to offer but maudlin clichés.

Music: The title theme by the normally reliable Daniel White is an ickily sweet travesty. To make matters worse in what's supposed to be a 'class product', several atrocious bum notes can be heard on both piano and synthesiser. Yes, that's right: synthesiser. Like Franco's 1972 medieval witch-burning epic *The Demons* with its whacka-whacka funk guitars, the music in *Fall of the Eagles* cares little for period verisimilitude; unlike *The Demons*, it doesn't feel like a gleeful collage of old and new but more like a cost-cutting measure that no one's supposed to notice. And if the film were not trying so hard to be respectable it wouldn't matter so much that Daniel White sounds as though he's tickling the ivories after one too many brandies. As for Lilli, her singing is supposed to raise the spirits of German war casualties, although to hear her charmless braying you'd think she was working for the British Secret Service...

Locations: Filmed in France. The Strauss residence, where much of the action takes place, is a chateau on the outskirts of Paris previously seen hosting black magic ceremonies in Franco's *Exorcism* (1974).

Connections: Like its most obvious influence, Fassbinder's *Lili Marleen* (1981), *Fall of the Eagles* sets out to emphasise the humanity of the German characters, be they civilians or soldiers. *Lili Marleen* was hardly Fassbinder's finest hour, but I think it's fair to say that Franco fails to match its complexities ... Footage of tanks and desert warfare is drawn, once again, from Alfredo Rizzo's *I giardini del diavolo* (1971): in fact it's the very same footage that was edited into *Oasis of the Living Dead* back in 1981. Snowy winter footage depicting German soldiers under Allied fire in a ruined house, along with sundry shots of Nazi trains and tanks, has been ported across from Eurociné's *Train spécial pour SS* (d: Alain Payet, 1977) and *Convoi de filles* (d: Pierre Chevalier, 1978) ... Eurociné may have pilfered the title from the 1977 book *The Fall of Eagles: The Death of the Great European Dynasties* by Cyrus Leo Sulzberger II, a historical volume detailing the gradual erosion of the Houses of Habsburg, Hohenzollern, and Romanov.



DOWNTOWN HEAT

(English-language export title)

France & Spain, 1990

French visa no: 72714

depósito legal no: unknown

Original theatrical titles in countries of origin

Downtown Heat (ciudad baja) (SP)

Down Town (FR)

Alternative titles

Ciudad baja (SP video) *Downtown*

Belvárosi Hőség (HUN video) *Downtown Heat*

Strzelanina w centrum miasta (POL DVD) *Downtown Gunfight*

Downtown heat (ciudad baja) (SP TV version #1)

La punta de las viboras [SPTV version #2] *The Head of the Vipers*

Unconfirmed titles

La ville basse (shooting title [MF])

Vipers (alt. export title)

Production companies

E.L.M.T. (Paris)

Fervi Films (Madrid)

Theatrical distributor

None

Timeline

Shooting date	January	1990
French visa issued	04 September	1991
Spanish approval date	7 October	1994
Spanish Canal+ screening	27 June	1995
as <i>Downtown heat (ciudad baja)</i>		
Spanish TVE-1 screening	08 June	1997
as <i>La punta de las viboras</i>		

Records at the Spanish Ministry of Culture claim that the film played in Madrid on 14 October 1994. However, Madrid cinema listings for that day do not support this assertion. As far as can be told, the film did not play theatrically anywhere in Spain. It's likely that the SMC screening was either a press show or a trade show.

Theatrical running time

France	100m
Spain	95m

DVD running time (converted)

FR 'Twel' PAL DVD	97m58s
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director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**, **Michael Katims**. producers: **Jess Franco**, **Eric Lardy**. director of photography: **Nathalie Abensour** [as 'Nat Abensour']. music: **Daniel J. White**. 1st assistant director: **Nathalie Baehrel**. 2nd assistant director: **Charles S. Chaplin** [as 'Charlie Chaplin']. coach: **Robert Long**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. production assistants: **Anny Chelossi**, **David Evans**. camera assistants: **Enrique López Quesada**, **Michael Fulton**. stills photographer: **Luis Albert**. special effects: **Loris Omedes**. electricians: **Mony Caballero**, **Jesús Peregrí**. perchman: **J.C. Rodríguez**. opérateur Dolby: **José Carlos Guardiola**. make-up: **Manuela Moreno** [as 'Manu Moreno'], **Elsa Bonnet**. art director: **Daniel Katz**. music performed by: keyboards: **Kitflus**; bass: **Carlos Benavent**; percussion: **Ernest Martínez**; batterie: **Salvador Niebla**; guitar: **Jordi Bonell**; saxophone: "**Phibus**". 'Opera' sequences: **Sergio López** (Mario). **J. Parrila** (sparafucile). Orchestre Municipal de Vilanova conducted by **Jordi Valls Fuster**. production managers: **André Chelossi**, **Antonio Liza**. music editée par **E.L.M.T. Productions**. sound recordist: **Jean-Claude Reboul** [as 'Jean C. Reboul']. assistant sound recordists: **Nicolas Reboul**, **Joan Vidal**. Ultrason stéréo: **Jaume Puig**. editor: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa María Almirall], **N. Baehrel**. casting: **Claire Newell** (Los Angeles), **Marta Flores** (Barcelona). colour: **Fujicolor**. laboratories: **Fotofilm** (Barcelona), **Telcipro** (Paris). recording: **Mixage Stéréo**, **S.I.S. La Garenne Colombe**. world sales: **Atlas Films** Los Angeles/Munich. colour: **Fujicolor**. sound: **Ultrastereo**. we thank the authorities and people of Vilanova and La Geltru Barcelona for their collaboration in the making of this film.

Cast: **Óscar Ladoire** [as 'Oscar Ladoire'] (Alberto Romero). **Craig Hill** [as 'Graig Hill'] (Thomas Radeck). **Philippe Lemaire** (Luc Badal). **Robert Long** (Chucho, Radeck's right-hand man). **Daniel Katz** (Flores Fuentes). **Josephine Chaplin** (Maria Mendoza). **Steve Parkman** (Paul Bowles). **Lina Romay** (Melissa). **Mike Connors** (Steve Previn, the American cop). **Noel J. Sampson** [as 'Noel Samson'] (Jeff, Previn's boss). **Antonio Mayans** (Carlos Rivas, Alberto's buddy in 1st scene). **Jaime Mir Ferri** [as 'Mir Ferry'] (Louis Betancourt, banker). **David Fulton** (Police Commissioner). **Victor Israel** (vagabond). **Francisco Jarque Zurbano** (vagabond's buddy). **Sergi López** (tenor singing opera on stage). **Peggy Ann Down**. **Ann Novack**.

Synopsis: *When his partner Carlos Rivas is killed while attempting to arrest two men seen disposing of the body of a young woman, idealistic cop Alberto Romero gives chase, only for his boss, Captain Luc Badal, to radio and order him to desist. Disgusted, Alberto discovers that his boss is being leaned upon by the chief of police, who in turn is covering for the local drug lord, Don Thomas Radeck. Alberto turns his attention to the plight of Paul Bowles, a young man looking for his missing wife, Alysson, who was addicted to drugs. Alysson ran off with a lesbian lover, Melissa, whom Paul traces to punk gang living in a wrecking yard.*

Lina Romay as punk lesbian drug addict and wrecker of marital bliss, Melissa.



He and Melissa find Alysson's body hidden in the boot of a wrecked car; she has been murdered by her dealer. Melissa points out the dealer at a nightclub and Paul stabs him to death. Alberto arrives and saves Paul from being killed by the dealer's friends. He tells him of a plan he's hatched with Steve Previn, an American vice cop eager to arrest Radeck for drug offences in the USA. With the help of his dead partner's girlfriend Maria, and Captain Badal, whom Alberto has shamed into making a stand against corruption, Previn, Paul and Alberto kidnap Radeck's promiscuous daughter Lupita and set a trap to catch him. After a shoot-out, Previn finally handcuffs Radeck, but Maria takes the law into her own hands...

Production notes: In stark contrast to its minor artistic importance, *Downtown Heat* became the subject of a bitter and protracted court wrangle between Franco and Eurociné majordomo Marius Lesoeur, his long time friend and production associate since the French release of *La reina del Tabarin* in 1961. After bitter disagreements with Lesoeur during production of *Fall of the Eagles*, Franco took his next film, *Downtown Heat*, elsewhere. Lesoeur claimed rights over the script, a contention which led to a drawn-out trial process lasting four years. The final ruling went against Lesoeur, but by then the competing French production company E.L.M.T. were in financial trouble. Consequently the film received no distribution in France and only TV screenings in Spain. As a result of all this, Franco and Marius Lesoeur's business relationship was fatally damaged. It was the end of Franco's dealings with Eurociné (although there must have been an olive branch offered, probably some time in 2003 when Lesoeur died, aged 92, because in 2005 Daniel Lesoeur, Marius's son and business partner, entered into talks with Franco for a possible sequel to *The Awful Dr. Orlof* – see *Snakewoman*, 2005).

Review: A crime drama with one eye on possible cable TV bookings, *Downtown Heat* is as vapid and characterless a film as Jess Franco ever shot – which is not to say that it doesn't function competently as a middle-of-the-road straight-to-video shelf-filler, but that's hardly a recommendation. The locations are blandly attractive, the cast are blandly attractive, and most of the acting is blandly successful within the limited ambition of the picture. Unlike his mid-1980s misfires, there's no sense of the film being thrown together in three days. Everything about the film is staunchly professional.

If this sounds like I'm damning with faint praise, well, you're right. All that *Downtown Heat* proves is that if he'd wanted to, Franco could have spent the 1990s churning out thoroughly ordinary cop-show guff. The highlight amid the shallows is Lina Romay's picturesque turn as a lesbian druggie who's stolen nice guy Paul's girlfriend and seduced her into a life of scuzz. Hanging around with a pack of Tromaesque new wave goons, and decked out in punkoid make-up, Romay upstages the rest of the cast; even leading man Paul (Steve Parkman), who's handsome but oh-so boring. No wonder his wife left him; taking drugs in a wrecked

car with a punk lesbian looks a hell of a lot more fun than being married to this dickless catalogue model.

Adding a puke stain of a different sort to the powder blue jackets and beige action is a reactionary streak of police vigilantism, and some strident anti-drug chest-beating. As mentioned in the review of *Dark Mission*, Franco's hostile attitude to drugs had been building up throughout the 1980s: perhaps he saw friends getting sucked into self-destructive behaviour, maybe the AIDS epidemic made him more intolerant of the drug scene. But Franco makes an implausible moralist, and it's unedifying to see him rolling out the conservative big guns in such a crude battle of good against evil. Making salacious sex films about women abused in penal servitude, we could at least credit Franco with a healthy fantasy life and a lively sense of irony, but there's no such evidence here. Listening to characters haranguing drug users for having "no imagination" in a film with no imagination, and then watching supposedly heroic cops gunning down a drug dealer in the name of 'real justice' just as he's about to be arrested, I have to say my patience finally snapped: I'm not about to stomach *Jess Franco*, of all people, turning into a karaoke Michael Winner.

Cast and crew: Mike Connors, star of nearly 200 episodes of US TV cop show *Mannix*, takes top billing, although he only shows up for the last twenty minutes. It's a pity he couldn't get there earlier, because the main actor, Óscar Ladoire, is unconvincing and terribly dull. Philippe Lemaire returns for the second and by far the least of his two roles for Franco, the first being 'Pipo' in 1973's excellent *Al otro lado del espejo*. Josephine Chaplin also makes an unexpected return, following her prior Franco credit playing the female lead in *Jack the Ripper* (1976). Her son Charles would go on to work with Franco on *Jungle of Fear* and *Killer Barbys*. Prolific Barcelona-based character actor Victor Israel (*The House That Screamed*; *Necrophagus*; *Horror Express*; *Crimson*) makes his one and only appearance for Franco as a vagabond in a brief dockside sequence, while Antonio Mayans is gunned down in the first three minutes, leaving him free to work as production manager. The star of *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, Daniel Katz, plays a snivelling deadbeat crook snuffed out by his buddies for bungling the disposal of a hooker, and look out for Sergi López, the murderous Captain Vidal in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, who has a fleeting role as an opera tenor on stage during the film's moderately well orchestrated murder of the chief of police.

Music: The title theme, which reoccurs frequently, features someone going bananas on a fretless electric bass, played in the 'slap' mode popularised by Level 42 – although this guy is so far beyond Level 42 he's on the roof of the Empire State Building. Either he's sending up the project, or else he's been gobbling some of those heinous *drugs* the film keeps warning us about...

Locations: Shot in Vilanova i la Geltrú, a fishing port in the province of Barcelona about 10km up the coast from Sitges.

Connections: Surprisingly there are no thematic links to the 1975 Franco film *Downtown*, which featured the director himself playing his perennial private eye character Al Pereira.

JUNGLE OF FEAR

UNRELEASED

Spain, 1993

Alternative titles

La jungla del miedo (SP) *Jungle of Fear*
The Golden Beetle

Production companies

Blackwood Inc. (USA)

Imatco Prod. (Lluria, Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date 1993

Running time

unfinished work-print 124m45s

director/producer: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**, from **Edgar Allan Poe's** "The Gold Bug". director of photography: **Luis Colombo**, **Javier Perez Zofio**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. gaffer: **Javier Catalan**. make-up: **Juana la Morena**. assistant director: **Regina Mayans**. editor: **Lina Romay**. special effects: **Michael Wollenzach**.

Cast: **Michael Longfield** (Jim Noon). **William Berger** (Professor Quasimodo aka Professor Quasi-Moto). **Charles S. Chaplin** (Chuck). **Lina Romay** (Lucy). **Antonio Mayans** (Machado). **Mónica Pont** (Furia). **Henri Lambert** (Red-Cloaked Mystic). **Jérôme Pradier**. **Deborah Simon**. **Fatima Michalzick**. **Mariola**. **José R. Centenero**. **Olivier Townsend**. **Benjamin Serra**. **Manuel Seville**. **May lo Han**. *IMDb adds:* **Allya Campbell**. **Mr. Queen** (bodyguard). Note: although the IMDb lists Christopher Mitchum and Howard Vernon among the cast, neither appears in the 124m work-print.

Synopsis: *When a TV journalist called Machado discovers a mechanical golden scarab beetle, from which a strange sound emanates, he sends a tape of the extraordinary object to Jim Noon, a friend who runs the documentary department of a major Spanish TV company. Noon, together with his skilled editor Lucy and clever young production assistant Chuck, watches the tape and studies the sound recording. Working out that the sound is actually a slowed down human voice, Chuck and Lucy speed it up to decipher what it says. It turns out to be a clue to the whereabouts of a great treasure, hidden after the Second World War by a Nazi called Van Helsing. Noon and his team head into the jungle in search of the treasure, but must decipher a series of clues and riddles to do so. They are joined by Tamita, Machado's lover, who informs them that Machado has been kidnapped by a gang led by his personal assistant, Juliet Foster. Also searching for the treasure is Furia, a dominatrix who uses a whip to subdue those who stand against her. The trip leads around the world,*

from the forests of Amazonia to the Philippines. Along the way they bump into Furia, who tries to force the group to divulge their information by torturing Lucy. Lucy is saved when a mystical guru appears and subdues Furia with smoke bombs and mind control. Continuing on their way, Noon and his team meet Dr. Quasimodo, a wealthy hunchbacked academic who gives them further clues to the whereabouts of the treasure. Eventually their quest is rewarded when they find a cave in which the walls are braided with seams of pure gold; perhaps this is the mythical Eldorado itself? As they celebrate their discovery, they are joined in the cave by two more parties: one led by Furia and the other by Juliet, with Machado in tow. The motivations of each party are laid bare in a tense confrontation, and eventually Jim Noon and his group must acknowledge that the gold is not theirs to take.

Production notes: The early 1990s were a frustrating time for Franco. Accustomed to making multiple films per year, he found himself struggling to direct even one. Much of his time between 1990 and 1993 was taken up with putting together a version of Orson Welles' unfinished *Don Quixote*, which he had worked on in the 1960s as an assistant director. But although he poured a lot of time and dedication into honouring his old friend's memory, the resulting film was poorly received by critics. Besides, nothing could take the place of shooting a movie of his own. After protracted attempts to secure American financing from producers such as Troma, Franco finally managed to pull together a US-Spanish co-production of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug", a story he had first attempted in 1979 (see the unfinished *El escarabajo de oro*). When the project suffered setbacks yet again, Franco must have felt it was jinxed. This time, the American funding fell through mid-shoot, due, according to critic Francesco Cesari, to illicit investments on the part of the financier. The film limped into post-production with only Spanish capital in the bank. Franco assembled a rough cut, at which point everything ground to a halt and the film was never completed. One year later, the Alicante press reported that a complaint had been filed by the crew of the film, who claimed to have not been paid. Franco denied this and retorted that the story was an attempt at defamation by a spurned employee. Thus the project ended in acrimony and failure. The film itself is an unusual case, in that unlike other unfinished Franco projects it can actually be seen today, thanks to a demo tape (sent to Canal Plus in France) which has since made its way onto the collectors' circuit...

Review: Thirty seconds into the unfinished work-print of *Jungle of Fear*, as one is trying to guess which Daniel White composition Jess Franco would have used for the opening panning shot, a joke-shop snake suddenly lunges at the camera, plastic jaws snapping. A minute later, a woman is bitten by a flying plastic beetle propelled on a piece of twine, and a man awakens from a fall to discover an unconvincing plastic scorpion twitching its stinger at his throat. If we're in any doubt as to why this film has never been finished, we need only consider these dire and cheapjack effects, which probably

had potential investors shaking their heads and heading for the exit before the film had even got started. It's a shame, though, because *Jungle of Fear* had the potential to be a pacy, enjoyably absurd action-adventure.

Having watched the only surviving video transfer, I can say that the obstacles to enjoyment are numerous, but not insurmountable. What we have is a rough cut running just over two hours, which would probably have been cut down to ninety minutes. At least a third of the footage is without sound; there's no music at all; some of the Spanish cast badly need redubbing; and the quality of the extant videotape is atrocious. However, once you adjust to these challenges there's a lot to enjoy in this light but energetic tale. Many of the film's shortcomings could be straightened out in a dubbing studio, and there's definitely enough going on in the story to create a satisfying ninety-minute feature. It would never have been among the highlights of Franco's career, but as a pulp fiction adventure romp it leaves clunkers like *La esclava blanca* and *Golden Temple Amazons* in the dust.

From a production point of view, the work-print provides a compare-and-contrast insight into the difference between professional actors and enthusiastic amateurs. Michael Longfield, an American TV soap actor turned Barcelona theatre actor, gives a dynamic central performance, energising the film and finding exactly the right tonal register for this sort of hokum. He doesn't ham it up, he doesn't underplay, he simply gives the film the energy and brio it needs. Longfield's contribution is indispensable, because most of the cast are either noticeably amateur, or else they're decent Spanish actors forced to deliver their lines in English, which means they struggle to play scenes that would have been well within their range in their native tongue. Lina Romy, for instance, is a confident actress, and she's 'in the zone' giving a real performance, but her English pronunciation is borderline indecipherable. Antonio Mayans copes better; his English is accented, but much easier to understand.

In the 1990s, the commercial European film market bent more and more towards the American model. Filmmakers in Italy and Spain, countries which had long preferred dubbing their dialogue later, began to require the actors to speak English on set, because dubbed films were on the way out and direct sound was preferred. Anything to avoid that oh-so-terrible crime for English-speaking markets: bad lip synch. Even minor characters speak English in *Jungle of Fear*, when it's clearly not their first language, so it seems likely that Franco intended to use as much of the live track as possible, a decision that would lead to bad performances and indecipherable accents in his later video productions. That said, I'm sure at least some of the cast would have been redubbed: for instance a Japanese woman at the temple of 'Quasi-Moto' walks along mumbling "mur-mur-mur, mm, mm, mur-mur"!

Speaking of 'Quasi-Moto', *Jungle of Fear* features another stand-out performance by William Berger, one of Franco's regular actors since *Los ojos del doctor Orloff* in 1973. Here he plays a professor and self-described hunchback, a boozy raconteur living it up in the

jungle in kingly splendour, who has taken the name Dr. Quasimodo as a joke, which for further laughs he's changed to 'Dr. Quasi-Moto' in deference to his Far-East location. Berger's skills give the film another shot in the arm: Longfield, Berger and Mayans do the heavy lifting, while Romy and Chaplin occupy the middle ground and the rest of the cast try not to bump into the furniture.

The plot itself is a globetrotting chain of events, with clues leading Noon's intrepid film crew from continent to continent (although due to terrible sound on the degenerated video copy I was not always able to decipher exactly where they were meant to be). At one point Berger tells his young assistant that he's heading for what sounds like "*Nucus, in the Republic of Katakalpigi*", which sounds like Francoesque gibberish to me, but afterwards Mayans says he's going to Santo Domingo. Even this doesn't help us: according to Wikipedia there are thirty-one places in the world called Santo Domingo!

Perhaps having time on his hands led Franco to work a little harder on the dialogue for this film, as it's among his most quotable. When Noon translates the voice of the bug, Lucy is surprised and asks, "*You speak German?*", to which he replies, "*Sure, it's just like Yiddish!*" Later, after Lucy and Chuck discover that the bug's riddle is a literary quotation, Noon responds, "*Isn't that remarkable? A bug that quotes Goethe!*" When the quartet of adventurers meet Doctor Quasimodo in his jungle palace (complete with swimming pool), he tells them about Van Helsing, the originator of the riddles they are trying to solve: "*He once said, 'I'm a patriot of the mind. My only allegiance is the intellect.'*" As far as I've been able to ascertain, this beautiful epithet is Franco's invention, not a quote from Bertrand Russell or Andrei Tarkovsky! When Noon asks Quasimodo (who refuses to divulge his real name) how he has managed to amass such a fortune, he replies, "*They say if you touch the hunch of a hunchback it brings good fortune. Well, I touch mine every day.*" Franco's sense of humour is apparent throughout the film: for instance, the mystical guru played by Henri Lambert who rescues the adventurers from Furia, an evil dominatrix, won't let them leave until they've used their video camera to take vanity shots of him posing with his assistants. "*Send me a copy!*" he insists. I also loved the scene in which Machado's spunky black girlfriend Tamita hides from a pursuer by ducking into the gents toilets and pretending to be a man using a urinal, voicing her own sound effects to seal the illusion.

What is it about this tale that so entranced Jess Franco? He first tried to film it in 1979 (see *El escarabajo de oro*), and then mounted partial adaptations with *La noche de los sexos abiertos* and *En busca del dragón dorado*. I think perhaps the defining quality of the story, which becomes clear in the *Jungle of Fear* version, is the old adage that it's better to travel hopefully than it is to arrive. The quest structure, with its deciphering of clues and globetrotting chain of inferences and adventures, is rather like the career which Franco had carved for himself: no single film is the be-all-and-end-all, no commercial or artistic goal dominates. The journey is the thing. *Jungle of Fear* reaches what would normally be the apex

of a conventional adventure yarn, only to undercut the climax and essentially throw it away, by having Noon and his chums agree to leave the gold where it is. All that Franco seems to have wanted from life is the chance to keep filming, keep moving, keep the ball rolling, and it's tragic that this particular film, in which he finds a neat metaphor for his life's work, should have never reached fruition. Of course there's also an irony here: when the 'message' is that process is more important than completion (just as the tease is more important than the release in his erotic films), it seems weirdly appropriate that Franco should have failed, yet again, to reach completion on the very project making that point!

By the end of this battered and bruised VHS transfer, I had warmed to *Jungle of Fear*, in fact I found it oddly moving. Perhaps because it feels like the end of something – the end of a certain kind of innocence. As the story ends, so too does the classical film career of Jess Franco. For all its evident faults and shortcomings, *Jungle of Fear* is a properly cinematic undertaking, made within the narrative requirements of commercial exploitation cinema, and guided purely by the compass of Franco's love for pulp fiction. It's his last film made without self-consciousness regarding his status as a cult director. Hereafter, from the transitional *Killer Barbys* onwards, his career would be sponsored by young fans-turned-producers who had collected his earlier films on video, and as a result, a 'postmodern' awareness of his reputation began to leak into the films themselves...

Franco on screen: Jess plays a street beggar who claims to be an out of work opera singer, "*as famous as Michael Jackson!*"

Cast and crew: Charles S. Chaplin (real name Charly Sistovaris) is the son of Josephine Chaplin, who starred in Franco's *Jack the Ripper*, and grandson of film legend Charles Chaplin. He's reasonably adept at keeping up with Michael Longfield, with whom he's paired throughout most of the film, which is commendable given that the older man is firing on all cylinders. However, there's a touch of gaucheness in Chaplin's manner which hints that this is an early outing for the actor, who would perhaps have benefitted from a few more takes than Franco was inclined to offer.

Music: None.

Locations: The Santa Catalina Hotel, Gran Canaria, pops up for the umpteenth time (it had been a regular Franco haunt since the late 1970s), indicating that the film was at least partly lensed on the Canary Islands. Scenes where the adventurers steal a skull from a temple, and then run through a landscape dotted with ruined buildings, were shot near Calpe, at the same ruins seen in *Eugénie, historia de una perversion*. Location footage shot in Thailand by Juan Soler for *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido* crops up here to represent the Philippines.

Connections: The words emanating from the golden beetle, "*It's nightfall when the devil awakens,*" are, we are told, from Goethe's *Walpurgisnacht*. The reference is to *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* ('The First Walpurgis Night'), a poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which had previously popped up as one of a mountain of quoted sources in Franco's 1967 film *Necronomicon*.

KILLER BARBYS

Spain 1996

Original theatrical title in country of origin

Killer Barbys

Alternative titles

Vampire Killer Barbys (UK DVD title)

O Massacre Dos Barbys (POR DVD title)

Ojos sangrientos (pre-shooting title)

Killer Barbies (shooting title)

Production companies

Civic Producciones S.L. (Spain)

Prospera S.L. (Spain)

Mencheta Benet S.L. (Spain)

Jacinto Santos PC (Spain)

Theatrical distributor

Jacinto Santos Parrás

Timeline

Shooting date	circa Jan/February	1996
Festimad, Madrid	08 May	1996
Spanish approval date	22 May	1996
Madrid	24 May	1996
SP 'Manga Films' VHS		1998

Theatrical running time

Spain	94m
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DVD running time

US 'Shriek Show' NTSC DVD	87m06
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director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Piluca Baquero**, **Manuel Camacho**, **Emilio Mencheta**, **Jacinto Santos**. original story: **Jess Franco**. screenplay and dialogue: **Patxi Irigoyen**, **Jess Franco** [as 'David Khunne II']. music: **Killer Barbies**, **Sexy Sadie**, **Daniel J. White**, **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. editor: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Ma. Almirall]. soundtrack: **Subterfuge Records**. production designer: **Tomás Cimadevilla** [as 'Tomas Zimadevilla']. production manager: **Piluca Baquero**. art director: **"Pistolo"**. costumes: **Jorge Castelli**. special effects: **Salva Vicent**, **Alfredo Contreras**. supervising sound editor: **Martin Culverwell**. script supervisor: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Ma. Almirall]. make-up: **Patricia Sanz Sala**. 1st assistant directors: **José Manuel Benayas**, **Tomás Cimadevilla** [as 'Tomas Zimadevilla']. gaffer: **José Luis Gómez**. focus puller: **Nuño Pérez Zofio**. electrician/key grip: **Antonio González**. 1st assistant production: **David Camacho**, **Yolanda Bernal**, **Cesar Sánchez Flores**, **Rafael González**.

auxiliary de camera: **Amparo Guillem**. stage manager: **Gonzálo Martínez**. boom operator: **Tomas Erice**. stills photography: **Rafa González, Vicente Maeso**. 2nd assistant production: **Fran López Cantos, Gabriel Ochoa Peris**. 2nd assistant director: **Marcus Soria**. assistant electricians: **Emilio Belmonte, Xavier Sala Camarena**. camera trainee: **Domenec Boronat**. assistant special effects: **Miguel Algarra, Alejandro Monsell**. making of: **Santiago Cerezo, Cristhian Sebastian, Enrique Revilla, Miguel Tasquer**. security: **Julio**. press/publicity: **Gemma del Valle, Manuel Romo, David Camacho**. trainees: **Antonio Francisco Marin, Vicente Blay Amezcua, Placer Fores**. music: "Love Killer" "I Wanna Live in Tromaville" "No Future" "Comic Books" written and performed by **The Killer Barbies**; "In the Water" "Let Me Rock You" "The Aware" "Lonely Green Tongue" "Plastic Face" "Outer Space" "The Dull Figure Knight" "Han Gover" "Johnny the Good" performed by **Sexy Sadie**; "Peut etre" "C'est la fille du vent" written by **Daniel J. White**. camera equipment: **Camara Vision**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. titles: **Carlos J. Santos**. sound re-recording: **Exa; Cinearte**. lighting equipment: **Amalgama; Pasarela**. gruas: **Muxart**. colour: **Fujicolor; Eastman Kodak**. logo: **Dolby Digital**. thanks to: **Ayuntamiento de Cullera; Isabel Salvador; Policía Municipal de Cullera; Parque de Bomberos de Cullera; Dr. Gonzo; Superbingo; Servifot; Escuela de Estudios Audiovisuales Videomax; Discoteca Chocolate; Paloma Borbone; Mortimer; Hotel Sicania (Cullera)**. this film made entirely in the Comunidad Valenciana.

Cast: **Santiago Segura** (Baltasar). **Mariangela Giordano** (Countess). **Aldo Sambrell** [as 'Aldo Sanbrell'] (Arkan). **Charlie S. Chaplin** (Mario). **Silvia Superstar** (Flavia). **Carlos Subterfuge** (Rafa). **Los Angeles Barea** [as 'Angie Barea'] (Sharon). **Billy King** (Billy). **Pepa López** (Pipa). **Alberto Martínez** (Pipo). **Enrique López Lavigne. Javier Bonilla**.

Synopsis: *Driving between rock venues in Spain one night, a touring punk band called The Killer Barbys (Flavia, plus two couples – Rafa and Mario, Billy and Sharon) are stranded in remote countryside after their van gets stuck in a pothole. A courtly old man called Arkan, secretary of the Countess Von Fledermaus, invites the group to spend the night at the Countess's castle. Flavia, Rafa and Mario accept the invitation but Billy and Sharon stay behind, opting to spend the night screwing in the van. On meeting the Countess, the band members are startled to realise that she is also the artist known as 'Olga Luchan'. Luchan is supposed to have been born over a hundred years ago; the band wonder how she could have remained looking so young. Eventually they discover that the Countess is a vampire who feeds on the blood of young people to rejuvenate herself. Meanwhile, Arkan's brutal and simple-minded servant Baltasar hunts down and kills Billy and Sharon...*

Production notes: By 1995, Jess Franco had virtually retired. He hadn't made a film for three years, which might not seem very long

for most directors, but for a man who once shot twelve films in a year was a veritable aeon. In 1994, breaking a decades-long habit, he'd attempted to obtain finance from the Instituto de Cinematografía (ICAA), a government organisation supposedly set up to fund Catalanian film production. Franco submitted a treatment for a film called "La misteriosa pista de Buda" ('The Mysterious Path of Buddha') through the Spanish production company Imatco, part of a project package with two other proposals: "La magnitud de la tragedia" to be directed by Francesc Ciurana, and "Estamos en el aire", planned for Manuel Esteban (the cinematographer responsible for Pere Portabella's *Cuadecuc Vampir*). However, the ICAA rejected the whole package. Given Franco's lifelong dislike of officialdom, the sniffy remarks of an ICAA spokesperson, quoted in the press about the decision, cannot have eased his irritation: *"In my opinion, the recent recovery of 30% for Catalonia from the total amount of aid that the Ministry of Culture grants to film production was an important objective, but precisely because of that, I believe that this 30% obliges us to maintain a minimum standard of product quality."*¹

Blessed relief from the prison of semi-retirement came when a Madrid-based independent music entrepreneur called Carlos Galán (aka Carlos Subterfuge) introduced Franco to a Spanish punk band called The Killer Barbies, led by vocalist Silvia Superstar (aka Silvia García Pintos) and drummer Billy King (aka Antonio Domínguez). Franco heard the band's debut album *Dressed to Kiss* (1995) and hit upon the idea of adding the group to a script he'd been tinkering with, concerning a bunch of tourists who get lost and find themselves menaced by a vampire when they seek shelter at an old castle... During post-production on the film, in March 1996, an American writer and publisher called Kevin Collins visited Málaga and spent time with Franco and Lina Romay in preparation for a career-spanning interview. He soon found himself involved in the process of finishing Franco's latest film, as he explained in a 1996 special edition of Craig Ledbetter's *European Trash Cinema Special #1 Jess Franco*: *"Jess took Hugh [Gallagher] and me along to the video studio to watch the very interesting and entertaining color-and brightness-enhancing transfer process as Jess supervised a new edition of the trailer. And, topping it all off for me, Jess actually asked for and accepted my opinion on the title of the film. Although the rock band for which the film is named after is called The Killer Barbies, Jess didn't want to tempt fate or taunt the powers-that-be over at Mattel Toys so he decided to retitile the film with a phonetical equivalent of the word 'Barbies.' The tongue-defying title which had already been burnt onto the screen was 'Killer Barbys.' When I told Jess that bar-byes sounded neither like 'Barbies' nor anything else, he asked me how I would spell it. My suggestion – and the title which was immediately emblazoned upon the screen, was the current, and soon to be famous, Killer Barbys."*

Review: *Killer Barbys* follows the adventures of a rock band called The Killer Barbies (spelled differently in the title to avoid litigation from toy manufacturers Mattel), whose tour van breaks down one night in remote countryside. As dry ice wafts across the screen, the band meet the sinister Arkan, a well-dressed older man who claims

to represent a local noblewoman: Olga Luchan, the Countess of Fledermaus. Three of the group accept his offer of a bed for the night at the Countess's castle, only to discover that their host likes to rejuvenate herself by consuming the life force of unwary young travellers. The Killer Barbies fit the bill perfectly; young, dumb, full of cum, and with a small enough fan base not to be missed. Will the Countess increase the posthumous value of the Killer Barbies' back catalogue by murdering the lot of them? Or will the band get all eighties on her ass and fight back?

As a shopping list of elements for a horror movie camp-fest this could sound promising. There's nudity, decapitation, blood-streaked cadavers hung by the ankles, midgets doing what midgets do in these situations, and a man being gorily stabbed during sex by a ravening vampire woman. Unfortunately it's all just a festering embarrassment, filled with idiotic characters and witless dialogue. Some critics claim that *Killer Barbys* sees Franco 'engaging with youth culture'. If this is true, then heads up, ageing filmmakers, you can learn a lot: just import a group of T-shirt clad rockers into your narrative and, well, that's it. Job done. The mere presence of a rock band is enough to rebrand your oeuvre for the younger generation. Don't forget to use lots of 'their' music on the soundtrack too, that'll really seal the deal. If you want to know just how 'engaged' Jess Franco is with these youngsters and their tepid version of post-grunge punk rock, we learn that they like a joint, enjoy sex, and find the artefacts in the Countess's castle 'spooky'. "*That totally looks like a horror film,*" says one, examining a stuffed monkey-head on a fireplace.

Sympathetic commentators are on slightly firmer ground when they point out that the film is structured as a generational conflict. The casting of 59-year old Mariangela Giordano, playing a sex-crazed vampire who sucks on the life essence of teenagers, suggests that Franco was indeed working along these lines. What a shame that the story gives the talented Giordano so little to chew on when it comes to exploring this promising theme; 'horny young rockers good, wealthy old bitch bad' just about sums it up. Trooping a Scooby-Doo van-load of young people into a narrative predicated on the wickedness of the older generation is a trope already explored with a great deal more economy and wit in Mario Bava's *Bay of Blood* (1971), in which a quartet of jolly young victims roll into the story without warning, only to be picturesquely slaughtered to the accompaniment of a gradually encroaching mood of melancholy and gloom. Here, however, no vestige of real horror is allowed to darken the film's 'just-for-larfs' attitude. In a gesture that had this old punk retching over his bondage slippers, the end credits announce, "*Finally, nobody really died; the proof of it is that we can applaud them this evening in Valencia. Our story is, in reality, a creation of pure fantasy.*" Phew, I'm glad that's settled; we don't want the fans having nightmares...

We need to examine one more piece of the puzzle to explain why *Killer Barbys* is bad in a way that even clunkers like *La esclava blanca* or *Downtown Heat* are not; image quality. Although shot on super-16mm film, this is the first Jess Franco film to have been

heavily tampered with in a video edit suite. The result is an image that looks more like videotape than celluloid (the line between the two having been eroded not so much by video upgrading to resemble film, but by film being tweaked until it resembles video, a process involving the suppression of grain in favour of higher and higher resolution). Franco would soon embrace the money-saving possibilities of shooting entirely on video, but thanks to some very poor telecine-era transfer practices *Killer Barbys* already looks like it (to see what I mean, look at the close-ups during the scenes in Balthazar's cannibal kitchen). As if to mount a rearguard action against the ugliness of the image, occasional lens smearing has been added to soften the ugly televisual clarity. Unfortunately it's the kind of tacky diffused lighting you'd expect for romantic flashbacks in a cheap cable TV show, and it does the film no favours at all. Perhaps Franco hoped that it would make the dry ice look less hokey, but when you end up with an effect more suited to a sparkling wine commercial you really should think again.

Cast and crew: 'Silvia Superstar' (Silvia García Pintos) and 'Billy King' (Antonio Domínguez) formed The Killer Barbies in 1994, and released their first album *Dressed to Kiss* on Toxic Records in 1995. Of the real life group, only Superstar and King actually appear in the film; the other onscreen band members are actors, including Charles S. Chaplin, who had played a leading role a couple of years earlier in Franco's unreleased *Jungle of Fear* ... Mariangela Giordano, an actress familiar to Italian exploitation lovers as the mother who has her nipple bitten off by her zombie son in Andrea Bianchi's *Burial Ground* (1981), soars over the top during her climactic sex-and-death scene, but at least she's a proper actress whose face communicates more than just the satisfaction of being in a movie. Thank goodness, too, for reliable old pro Aldo Sambrell as Arkan. He manages to remain plausible despite being dubbed atrociously and paired up with the appalling Santiago Segura (from Alex de la Iglesia's *Day of the Beast* and *Acción Mutante*), whose self-indulgent performance winks at the audience and says, 'Hey look you guys, I'm in a horror film!'

Music: Does it matter that I personally find The Killer Barbies utterly bland and derivative? Not really; complaining about their music is pretty redundant given that the film is supposed to be about them. Who else should they sound like? They are what they are. The real problem is the way in which their songs are used by Franco; smeared here, there and everywhere like a 'dirty protest' against the film's tenuous atmosphere. The fact that the same numbers repeat, over and over again, simply compounds the felony ... By the way, in case you were tempted to criticise the musical limitations of the band, one of them plays the opening bars of Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D minor" on a harpsichord in the villainess's castle; so suck on that, fogeys, these kids can play classical too! (Actually it's one of the faux-members, actor Charles S. Chaplin.) Note too that Franco's own maunderings on the synthesiser, which pop up occasionally for the 'scary bits', are just terrible, a couple of naff presets on a Yamaha DX7 keyboard across which he swishes his fingers like a cleaner doing the dusting.

Dispiriting, given that Franco had shown consummate skill with atonality in his previous scores. Demerit points too for the 'live' location sound recording, another technical choice which squashes the atmospherics.

Locations: Cullera, near Valencia.

Connections: The corpse-like Countess bathes in the blood of young people to rejuvenate her flesh, which adds a touch of the Countess Bathory legend, previously touched upon in *Female Vampire* ... The murderous retarded servant Balthazar is a repackaging of Franco's beloved Morpho, albeit played by an actor who makes even *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein's* Luis Barboo seem a measurable thespian talent ... *Killer Barbys* sees the first and only reference in a Jess Franco film to *Mr. Bean* and *Upstairs Downstairs* ... "I love you more than Paul loved *Virginie*; *Cyrano* loved *Roxette*; more than *Romeo* loved *Juliette*," says Arkan to the Countess. The second and third of these references will need no explanation; the first, however, is a little more obscure. *Paul et Virginie* is the name of a 1787 novel by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, concerning two characters whose childhood friendship blossoms into love.

TENDER FLESH

USA, 1997

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Original title in country of origin

Carne fresca (SP) 'Tender flesh'

Alternative titles

Tender Flesh (Boccato di cardinale) (US DVD title)

Boccato di cardinale (shooting title)

Production company

One Shot Productions

Running time

US NTSC DVD 93m

Timeline

Shooting date	November	1996
US video release	20 October	1998

Running time

US 'Brook Edwards' NTSC DVD	91m12s
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director: **Jess Franco**. written by **Jess Franco**. produced by **Kevin Collins**, **Hugh Gallagher**, **Peter Blumenstock**.

executive producers: **Gabriel Iglesias**, **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Benjamin L. Gordon**. music by **Sexy Sadies**, **Daniel J. White**, **Jess Franco**; produced by **Subterfuge Records**, **Pizza Pop**. songs "Mr. Nobody", "Hangover" by **Jaime Garcia Soriano**; "Voodoo Sacrifice", "The Doll Figure Knight", "Mr. Hat", "Johnny Be Good" by **Miquel Serra**. line producers: **Christian Kessler**, **Toner van Bach**, **Videodrome**. assistant director: **Pedro Temboury**. camera assistant: **Raquel Cabra**. still photographer: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'E. Sharchgorosky']. electricians: **José A. Crespillo**, **A. Renford**. make up: **A. [Analia] Ivars**. direct sound [recording]: **Javier Caffarena**, **José María Álvarez**. English dialogue: **Simon Birrell**, **Barnaby Harrod**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Joaquín Phre']. editor: **Lina Romay** [as 'Rosa María Almirall']. cameras: **Camara Rent**. negatives: **Eastman Kodak**. laboratories: **Madrid Films, S.A.**. sound recorded at **Cinearte Studios** (Madrid). sound mixer: **Carlos Garrido**. sound assistant: **Raul Lasvignes**. sound supervisor: **Javier Fernández**. technical supplies: **Iluminación y Sonido** (Málaga). special thanks to: Hotel Amaragua; Hotel Miami; El Retiro Park; Moni Mayoral. the producers would like to thank: **Peter J. Evanko**; **Tim Greaves**; **Craig Ledbetter**; **Pierre A. Walton**; **Stephen Blickenstaff**; **Jeannine L. Francis**; **Guillermo Salamanca**; **Deborah Walton**; **Draculina Publishing**; **Michael Shutter**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Gorgona Radek). **Monique Parent** (Baroness Irina Kalman). **Aldo Sambrell** (Nauticus Kalman). **Alain Petit** (Paul Radek). **Analia Ivars** (Furia). **Miguel Caffarena** [as 'Mikel Kronen'] (Carlos). **Amber Newman** (Paula).

Synopsis: On the urging of her boyfriend Carlos, American actress Paula auditions for a job at the Club Emmerdeuse under the watchful gaze of manager Gorgona Radek. She forces Paula to strip, approves of what she sees and soon has the young woman performing an extravagant, erotic floorshow which she uses to audition young women for various of her wealthy clients. Paula soon attracts the attention of wealthy, gay financier Nauticus Kalman and his wife, the baroness Irina. On their instruction, Gorgona bribes Carlos to persuade Paula to visit their secret, tropical island – all for a substantial fee. The group travel to the island by yacht; joining them is Gorgona's husband Paul Radek, a chef and keen photographer. There awaits them a beautiful mansion hidden in the trees, as well as the wild – and wildly amorous – Furia, an Amazonian creature who came as part of the package when the Kalmans bought the island. The various characters get to know each other over a long dinner while Furia bestows her sexual favours on any of the guests she takes a fancy to. Carlos is told to leave the island, abandoning Paula, while Irina and Gorgona demonstrate their attraction for each other both in and out of the villa's immense swimming pool. Later that evening as the others watch, Paula is drugged and then brutally whipped by Furia. Later on, Furia rubs special spices into Paula's wounds and the following morning she feels well enough to look around the villa. She finds a television playing a message from Gorgona, explaining that the first person to retrieve a

briefcase left on a speedboat on the other side of the island can keep the money contained therein: some \$50,000. Paula makes straight for the case but is intercepted by Furia who transports her to a secluded part of the island and then sets her free. The Radeks and Kalmans intend to hunt down Paula for sport, with Gorgona and Irina both armed with a bow and arrows. Back in his hotel room, Carlos has second thoughts about abandoning Paula and decides to head back. Paula is wounded by Irina and Gorgona but manages to slit Irina's throat. The stricken Kalman finds Paula and shoots her dead. Carlos, back on the island, finds the briefcase but is executed by Furia with a single shot to the head. Later that evening, Paul serves up Irina for dinner.

Production notes: This next, substantial chapter in Franco's career came about by chance. Tim Greaves and Kevin Collins of magazine publishers 1-Shot Publications decided to produce a substantial booklet devoted to Lina Romay. The basis of what became *The Lina Romay Files: The Intimate Confessions of an Exhibitionist* was a career interview carried out in Spain in March 1996 (during post-production on *Killer Barbys*) by Collins as well as the publisher of *Draculina* magazine, Hugh Gallagher. The two became friends with both Lina and Jess and they began talking about giving the director the opportunity to make a film unencumbered by artistic interference. Peter Blumenstock of music publishers Crippled Dick Hot Wax in Germany provided some of the finance, as well as Gallagher of the re-named One Shot Productions, plus some private investors. Gallagher had already directed, produced and/or written several low-budget sex and horror titles such as *Gorgasm*, *Gorotica* and *Gorewhore*.

Review by Julian Gräinger: *Tender Flesh* recycles tropes, characters and storylines from several earlier Franco titles, notably *Countess Perverse* and *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*. This being said, the film is regrettably short on incident. It can be divided broadly into four acts: on the mainland at Lina's Club Emmerdeuse, on Kalman's yacht travelling to the island, dinner at the villa, and the hunting of Paula. As in *Countess Perverse*, this final section is based on Richard Connell's 1924 short story "The Most Dangerous Game", however *Tender Flesh* can barely devote fifteen minutes to what should be the film's big dramatic payoff. Once again it seems the great outdoors holds little interest for Jess and the hunting down of Paula looks like it was tossed off at the end of the shoot, demonstrating a critical lack of coverage and even less energy. I find it hard to recall a more lacklustre 'chase' sequence. Furthermore Lina and the statuesque Monique Parent display a startling inability to handle a bow and arrow, however fetching they may look wearing tiny leather jerkins while naked below the waist. Franco is, typically, less interested in narrative than creating an atmosphere, a look, an erotic ambience – and yet unfortunately the film fails to deliver on these elements either. The film is competently shot by Benjamin L. Gordon and the image quality is markedly better than the subsequent *Mari-Cookie* and *the Killer Tarantula*. The lighting of scenes is adequate and the

sequence between Carlos and Paula even features reasonably extensive coverage, yet there is little of interest onscreen to display.

The cast is fine: Lina looks sharp with her cropped hair, shades and grimaces; Amber Newman attempts to deliver a decent performance even if she does look rather haggard; simultaneously dapper and a touch seedy, Alain Petit (who looks like a friendlier version of Antony Sher) contributes a lovely touch when he sniffs the air as Lina approaches him, while Parent similarly works well, coming across like an American version of the compelling Brigitte Lahaie. And of course there is the ever-sleazy Aldo Sambrell – always a welcome presence – who is given next to nothing to do except, well, look sleazy. Apart from Lina, the real star of the show is Analía Ivars as Furia, a character so hyper-sexualised that at one point she seems to be working hard to seduce a parakeet in a cage – as well as turning gay Aldo Sambrell bisexual. Ivars sports a variation on her fur bikini from *Golden Temple Amazons* only this time it's a skimpy little number comprising the sort of metal medallions popular on the chests of Spanish men for decades. Nevertheless this mix of Spanish and American elements doesn't gel especially well: perhaps if Jess himself had been behind the camera, had had less time and even less money, the results may actually have been better. A weak script shouldn't be much of a problem with Franco's style of filmmaking but here you get the feeling that the characters just talk and talk for no good reason. Presumably the aim is character development but at the same time, no-one seems to care: we are informed that Furia seldom leaves the mansion during the day (it turns out she does) and that she chooses to be entirely mute (which she isn't – in the scene where Herr Kalman appears to have fallen for Furia and licks her breast, Furia exclaims "Men!", apparently having forgotten that she's supposed never to speak).

The film does try for a little shock now and again: the much-commented-upon scene in which Furia climbs onto the worktop in Petit's kitchen and actually pees into his bowl of marinade ("Ah, delicious!" he says on tasting the mixture) comes as something of a surprise, as does a long sequence in which Furia slavishly runs her tongue over every millimetre of Lina's black stilettos, which can only appeal to all those ardent foot fetishists out there. However uncertainty of tone finds the film frequently coping out: after the shoe-licking episode, Furia stays under the dinner table to perform cunnilingus on Monique Parent and a blowjob on Sambrell but these are shot coyly and merely drag out the running time. Similarly there is a moment when it looks as if Furia will give the injured Paula a damn good rimming but the scene abruptly cuts. A central moment in *Tender Flesh* is the scene in which Furia cruelly whips the prostrate Paula, a take on the scenes in *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* in which Christopher Lee's Dolmance and his cronies watch while Eugénie is tortured and violated. But here the scene lacks the vibrant red colours and sheer style of the earlier film and comes across as merely rather nasty – and not in a good way. The watching Gorgona Radek writhes ecstatically but can't do all the heavy lifting herself. This scene isn't helped by the rather



TOP: Gorgona (Lina Romay) and Irina (Monique Parent) hunt for human prey. BOTTOM: Paula (Amber Newman) must perform for the patrons of the Club Emmerdeuse, under the watchful eyes of Gorgona (Romay), Irina (Parent), Furia (Analia Ivars) and Kalman (Aldo Sambrell).

vague make-up effects and the lack of close-ups showing the whip actually making much contact with Amber Newman's naked body. A later scene in which Paula slits the throat of the baroness Irina barely leaves a mark but in a moment of very poor continuity, later shots of Irina's corpse show her covered in blood. Thus it comes as a shock when Furia executes the hapless Carlos with a shot to the head which results in a wonderful example of an old-fashioned, Peckinpahian gory squib effect.

Tender Flesh is full of peculiar moments: when Lina and Parent make out in the magnificent villa's swimming pool (and the location, incidentally, is stunning), they are watched by Aldo Sambrell's German character Herr Kalman, who plays the guitar and sings. Dubbed over the top is some group singing an English song in strongly-accented French. This confusion between the diegetic and non-diegetic elements of the scene might be interesting if it were part of some deliberate, audience-alienating schema, but it comes across as merely incompetent. Later on in the scene in which both Gorgona and Irina manage to hit Paula with their arrows – goodness knows how – loud audience applause is heard. Again, this idea seems to have been tossed in during post-production; perhaps in the hope of enlivening these insipid scenes but more likely in the hope that some unfortunate writer might care to expound on Franco's Brechtian distanciation techniques. Sorry everybody, it just ain't so.

Cast and crew: In the accompanying fifty-one-minute documentary *Bon Appetite: The Making of Tender Flesh*, it is revealed that the role of Carlos – here played by a pseudonymous Miguel Caffarena – was originally to have been played by Charles Chaplin Jr., grandson of the great comic who had already appeared in Franco's *Killer Barbys* as well as the unreleased *Jungle of Fear*. The same documentary makes several claims that Amber Newman was Franco's discovery, however this actress had already appeared in titles such as *Vamps* (1995) and *Evil Ambitions* (1996). Alain Petit, clearly delighted to be back acting in a film made by his old friend, was also the lead photographer and co-writer of *Bon Appetite*.

Music: Several scenes feature a harmonica score – shades of Ennio Morricone's iconic music for Sergio Leone's westerns – but the only relevance here would seem to be the presence of Leone regular Aldo Sambrell (Alfredo Sanchez Brell). The extended sequence in which Furia slavers over Gorgona's stilettos while their owner rubs her nipples in ecstasy is scored with a bland, modern rock track that merely accentuates the tedium of the whole exercise.

Locations: Málaga in Andalucía, southern Spain.

Connections: While Amber Newman takes a shower, the camera pans round to reveal a poster by Subterfuge Records for *Killer Barbys*. (A wet room does seem an odd place to put up a poster but there you go.) A character reminds us once more of Franco's illustrious former workmates: if Buñuel is namechecked in *Mari-Cookie*, here it is the maker of *Citizen Kane*: "My good friend Orson Welles once told me that the perfect martini was the one composed solely of gin and then you only imagine the martini. My problem is that I often forget to imagine the martini!"

MARI-COOKIE AND THE KILLER TARANTULA IN 8 LEGS TO LOVE YOU

USA, 1998

Alternative titles

Mari Cookie y la tarántula asesina (SP)

Mari-Cookie and the killer tarantula

Eight Legs to Love You (US alt. DVD cover)

Production companies

One Shot Productions (USA)

in association with **Draculina Cine** (USA)

Timeline

Shooting date		1998
US video premiere	10 July	2001
SP video release		2002

Running time

Original cut	85m
SP 'Vellavision' DVD	81m
US 'Sub Rosa' DVD	75m57s

director, writer, producer: **Jess Franco**. producers: **Kevin Collins**, **Peter J. Jevanko**, **Hugh Gallagher** for **One Shot Productions** (USA) in association with **Draculina Cine**, **Craig Ledbetter**, **Michael Coughlan**. director of photography: **Raquel Cabra**.* music: **Jess Franco**, **Daniel J. White**. editors and digital effects: **Juan José Villar**, **Santiago Aumesquet**, with the collaboration of **Centro de Tecnología de la Imagen (C.T.I.) (University of Málaga, Spain)**. production manager: **Pablo Ros Cardona** [as 'Pablo Ros']. 1st assistant director: **P. [Pedro] Temboury**. camera assistant: **Kike Canalia**. stills photographer: **E. Sharchgorosky**. electricians: **A. Renford**, **A. Alazred**. best boy: **J.A. Crespillo**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Joaquín Phre']. make up: **Eva I. Salcedo**. direct sound: **J. Caffarena**, **José A. Álvarez**. English dialogue: **Simon Birrell**. special jewellery for One Shot Productions by **Linnea Quigley**. laboratories: **M.T.T.C. Singen**. technical supplies: **C.T.I.; Sonocón**. negative: **Eastman Kodak**. digital process: **Dune Inc. Co.** songs "Sueño no 7" – **Fangoria & Intronautas**; "Big Toxic", "Caligula 2000" – **Lazy Sundays**; "Take Your Hair off", "Ballad for a Bad Girl", "It's a Shite Life" – **Jess Franco & his B. Band**; published by Subterfuge Records. dedicated to **Manuel Vázquez**.

* actual director of photography: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Mari-Cookie/Tarantula). **Michelle Bauer** (Sheriff Marga). **Linnea Quigley** (Tere). **Amber Newman** (Amy, Tere's daughter). **Analia Ivars** (Queen Vicious). **Robert King** (Martin, Mari's husband). **Pedro Temboury** [as 'Peter Temboury'] (Chuck Morrison). **Mavi Tienda** [as 'Mavi

Tiendra'] (Leona Tarantina). **María Gomes. Alberto Gonzalez** (the chauffeur).

Synopsis: *Several centuries ago, a Dutch aristocrat named Dame Maria Van Spielberg was viciously raped by a Spanish captain and afterwards, as she lay unable to move, a passing tarantula deposited its eggs inside her. Three months later a child was born who bore a marked resemblance to Lina Romay ... The present: situated near the seedy docks of Antephocastia is a spider-themed nightclub owned by Queen Vicious. One of the performers – avant-garde, punk rock star Mari-Cookie – sees androgynous-looking young woman Leona Tarantina watching her perform and draws her onto the club's giant spider's web set. After the show Mari-Cookie has her foot-fetishist chauffeur drive them home. Mari-Cookie's bedroom is similarly decked-out with enormous spiders' webs, on one of which is hanging Chuck Morrison, a missing performer who used to sing with Liberace and was once Mari-Cookie's boyfriend. Leona is attacked by Mari-Cookie, who is able to transform into a tarantula. Mari is chatting with her friend Tere by a hotel pool when local chief of police Marga arrives to question her about the spate of recent kidnappings and, in particular, the disappearance of Leona. Mari denies any knowledge, even when Marga tries to seduce her. Marga continues her investigation, visiting the nightclub to question Queen Vicious, where the two women make out. Meanwhile the state of Mari-Cookie's marriage is such that when she asks her English husband Martin for sex, he pretends to be too tired. Queen agrees to find out the location of Mari-Cookie's lair in return for Marga's agreement to let her sell cocaine at the nightclub. To this end, Queen asks Tere's daughter Amy to seduce Mari-Cookie. While performing her erotic dance at the nightclub, Mari-Cookie entices Amy onto the web set and the two make love. Tere arrives at the club with Sheriff Marga and is horrified to see her young daughter performing on stage. After the show, Mari-Cookie and Amy are driven back to the former's lair, followed at a distance by Queen and Martin. Mari and Amy make out, watched by Vicious and Martin and soon thereafter by Marga and Tere. Mari as the tarantula threatens to paralyse Amy but the assembled women agree to hand-over Martin in Amy's stead. Mari consigns Martin to her web and promises to induct Marga, Tere, Amy and Queen into 'the sisterhood of the tarantula'. Mari makes love to Queen before penetrating her with what might be a representation of a spider's penis and declaring that the world would soon hear from her again.*

Review by Julian Grainger: This reasonably entertaining, slightly batty little number should really surprise no-one familiar with Franco's seventies work for the Lesoeurs, Robert De Nesle and Erwin Dietrich. After a baffling opening/credits sequence, *Mari-Cookie* begins in classic Elite-Film style with small bunches of extras huddled round tiny tables pretending to be a nightclub audience. And the film starts as it means to continue, with the bulk of its running time made up of various women cavorting on an enormous spider's web rope set. (This can't have been at all comfortable; in one scene Lina is clearly seen sporting a mass of red marks below her knees.) In spite of its thrilling-sounding titular

elements, *Mari-Cookie's* tiny plot might well have been written on one side of the proverbial napkin. Jess attempts to make up for this deficit with his polyamorous, largely-female cast: a strangely under-utilised Linnea Quigley (charmingly acquiring a Spanish accent in the credits – if not onscreen, thank the Lord – as 'Linnéa') gives the impression that she was visiting the set and kindly agreed to put in a couple of scenes to help out old friends. The smirking, ever-lovely Michelle Bauer plays her lesbian sheriff Marga as the lascivious cop stripper-gram she is dressed up to be and to say the least, really throws herself into the role. Comely brunette Amber Newman is way-ahead in the American acting stakes as Quigley's nymphet daughter Amy and the striking, short-haired Mavi Tienda plays Mari-Cookie's first (on-screen) victim.

But without a doubt the film belongs to Lina Romay. Jess is evidently just as attracted to his wife's luscious, middle-aged body as he ever was to the early-70's skinny teenager. And Lina provides an extraordinary, wanton performance to match Jess's probing lens. If it is true that between takes, this actress was wont to sit on the sidelines quietly knitting, then her abandoned performance here feels all the more remarkable. She snarls and seduces like a raddled courtesan rejuvenated and Jess can't keep his camera off her. We are in no doubt that Lina is a mature woman but more than that, a mature *Spanish* woman; her unshaved pussy and ass, her soft belly and erect nipples contrasting with the petite, smooth young body of the American Amber Newman and the difference is: Lina oozes sex and sexuality – and it's an angry, predatory sexuality at that. The film is bookended with two sequences of Lina on 'the web': the first as she spies and then seduces lonely Mavi Tienda; the last as she works on buxom Analía Ivars. This last sequence is interesting for the way in which it elides Mari-Cookie's private space – the web-shrouded bedroom in her lair – with the very public arena of the nightclub. This works well with Jess's slightly 'delirious' approach to time and space, often to be found in the filmmaker's more personal works. How much of this is down to Jess forgetting, or more likely not caring, to shoot sufficient establishing and connecting footage is debatable. It certainly doesn't harm a low budget film when the director can establish a paradigm in which unconnected scenes can be juxtaposed without violating the work's essential style. Script supervisors be damned!

So what are we to make of this early One Shot production? Any film that declares itself 'An outrageous film by Jess Franco' is immediately a hostage to fortune. And as so often, it all comes down to tone: *Mari-Cookie* declares itself immediately as a comedy during its unusual credits sequence, wherein an English-accented narrator (later revealed to be the hastily renamed 'Robert King' as Mari's husband Martin) intones "Once upon a time during the cruel domination of the Netherlands by the Spanish army of Flanders..." and ends with a shot of the baby Lina, wearing bright pink make-up and blowing a raspberry at the camera à la Kenneth Williams' surprise appearance in the finale of *Carry On Follow That Camel* as the pram-occupying baby of lovely Angela Douglas. This means we can dismiss the patently absurd 'special effect' of the full-





body, moving tarantula into which Lina transforms herself – and then be slightly surprised that some moments when Lina's face is video superimposed onto (a different) spider are oddly effective and mildly disturbing. In terms of flesh-on-show, *Mari-Cookie* is what the Americans term a 'hard R': no penetration but loads of nudity, implied masturbation and cunnilingus. Michelle Bauer shows a lot more than might be expected, perhaps harking back to her days acting under the name 'Pia Snow' and when Amber Newman complains that her husband only wants to fuck her in the ass, Analía Ivars inspects her behind and Jess gets a good, clear shot of her shaved button. Oddly, Mari's only male victim Chuck (first assistant director Pedro Temborry) is shown suspended, naked from one of his host's giant webs but his full-frontal nudity is always carefully kept just-off screen.

If the Spanish cast largely play it straight, the American actresses are all over the place. It should come as no surprise that a film supported by a magazine devoted to Stateside Scream Queens might risk importing that very American style of filmmaking as typified by such directors as David DeCoteau and Fred Olen Ray. Franco's visual style, even on video, is the very antithesis of this. One is left with the slightly dispiriting feeling that the cast were given no specific direction by Franco and what's more, were left to their own on-screen devices.

So if 'uneven' is the order of the day, there is still much to recognise and perhaps enjoy: Jess slavishly reporting Lina's ecstatic writhings much as he had done nearly a quarter century earlier in films such as *Shining Sex* and *Midnight Party*; an opening scene that purports to be filmed from inside a recently raped woman's vagina but that is sufficiently poorly executed as to be complete gibberish. Then there are the unique line-readings of the British actor playing Mari's husband Martin, and a vigorous nightclub act from Analía Ivars with a horse's tale protruding from her anus.

So this occasionally funny, often mis-judged effort does at least have 'girl power' on its side: Mari-Cookie is the central character and in spite of her lascivious, murderous ways she is also positioned as the film's heroine. Perky Amber Newman features as a sort of Robin-esque sidekick and Michelle Bauer's extravagantly lesbian sheriff is entirely corrupt but given the line "*Don't trust your husband. Men are weak and false.*" Mother Linnea Quigley is the only character to show any moral concern about her 'little girl' and yet she is sufficiently relaxed to start snogging the sheriff only a couple of beats later. And in response to a question by a rather blousy Analía Ivars, Amy reveals that she and her mother sometimes make out. Ah, *plus ça change*, eh Jess? Nevertheless when this mangy quartet come up against the tarantula, they promptly decide to hand over the reprehensible Martin to her tender mercies and become part of Mari-Cookie's spider-esque little coven. And of course Lina survives to bite another day, granted the film's last line which, on eighteen or nineteen listenings, turns out to be a mangled "*The world will hear from me very soon.*"

And this is what virtually destroys the film as viable entertainment: the simply atrocious dialogue recording. Barely

a scene has been properly miked and the crude music-mix is sufficiently loud to obscure much of what little there is to be heard. This lack of clarity is often critical when plot points are involved, such as when Queen talks Amy into seducing Mari-Cookie for her. Much as it is a delight to hear Lina enthusiastically spraying out her dialogue in English, the thrill soon wears off as it becomes clear that the strongly-accented Spanish cast are largely unintelligible.

Locations: Málaga in Andalucía, southern Spain.

Franco: Jess's voice can be heard on the Spanish-dialogue track making infant gurgling noises, apparently from inside the womb!

Connections: The film is peppered with small references to both Jess's film world (the nightclub is located somewhere that sounds like Antephocastia) as well as his interests and history (Mari-Cookie's house is located at '25 Luis Buñuel Street', a nod to the celebrated filmmaker whose work influenced the younger Spaniard). Mari-Cookie's ancestor is named Dame Maria Van Spielberg while the set design takes us firmly – and happily – back to days of *The Diabolical Dr. Z*.

LUST FOR FRANKENSTEIN

(USA video/DVD title)

USA, 1998

Alternative titles

Lady Frankenstein (SP DVD)

Lust für Frankenstein (GER DVD)

El enviado (shooting title) 'The Envoy'

Production company

One Shot Productions (USA)

Draculina Cine (USA)

DVD distributor

Shock-O-Rama Cinema (USA)

Timeline

Shooting date	1998
Shock-O-Rama copyright date	2000
US video release	29 May 2001

Running time

SP 'Vellavision' DVD	87m13s
US DVD	79m25s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. producers: **Jess Franco**, **Kevin Collins**, **Hugh Gallagher**, **Peter J. Evanko** (for One Shot Productions), in association with **Draculina Cine**. director of photography: **Raquel Cabra** [actually **Jess Franco**]. music

composer and scoring: **Jess Franco**, **Mikel Sagüés** of Subterfuge Records. "Ubangi Stomp" (Horrorwitz/Underwood) Performed by the Ubangis; "I Want Your Blood Tonight" (Horrorwitz) Performed by **The Ubangis** (courtesy of Deceased Records). Additional Music: **Purr** (courtesy of Subterfuge Records). editor and digital effects supervisors: **Juan José Villar**, **Santiago Aumesquet**, with the collaboration of **Centro de Tecnología de la Imagen, University of Málaga, Spain**. production manager: **Pablo Ros Cardona** [as 'Pablo Ros']. 1st assistant director: **P. [Pedro] Temboury**. camera assistant: **Kike Canalia**. stills photographer: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'E. Sharchgorosky']. electricians: **A. Renford**, **A. Alazred**. best boy: **J.A. Crespillo**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Joaquín Phre']. make up: **Eva I. Salcedo**. direct sound: **Javier Caffarena** [as 'J. Caffarena'], **José A. Álvarez**. laboratories: **M.T.T.C. Singen**. technical supplies: **C.T.I.; Sonocón**. negative: **Eastman Kodak**. digital process: **Dune Inc. Co.** Acknowledgements: **Craig Ledbetter**, **Michael Coughlan**, **Dott Hundley**, **Tim Greaves**, **Michael Shuter**. *Additional credits for the American version:* editor: **Kevin Collins**. narration: **Sol Clink**. English narration: **Kevin Collins**. facilities: **Horizon Video**, New York. producers: **Kevin Collins**, **Peter J. Evanko**, **Karen Wong**. "Death of a Surfer" (Horrorwitz/Manos) composed and performed by **The Ubangis**. *Additional credits provided by the One Shot website:* editor: **Rosa Almirall** [aka **Lina Romay**].

Cast: **Michelle Bauer** (Goddess – The Creature). **Lina Romay** (Moira Frankenstein). **Analia Ivars** (Abigail). **Carlos Galán** [as 'Carlos Subterfuge'] (Frankenstein's Ghost). **Robert King** (Cyrus). **Amber Newman** (The Stripper). **Alex Cox** (Mario the Gardener). **Raquel Cabra** [as 'Rachel Sheppard'] (Moira, in dreams). **Pedro Temboury** [as 'Peter Temboury'] (Carlitos). **Bill Meelater** (Woodchopper).

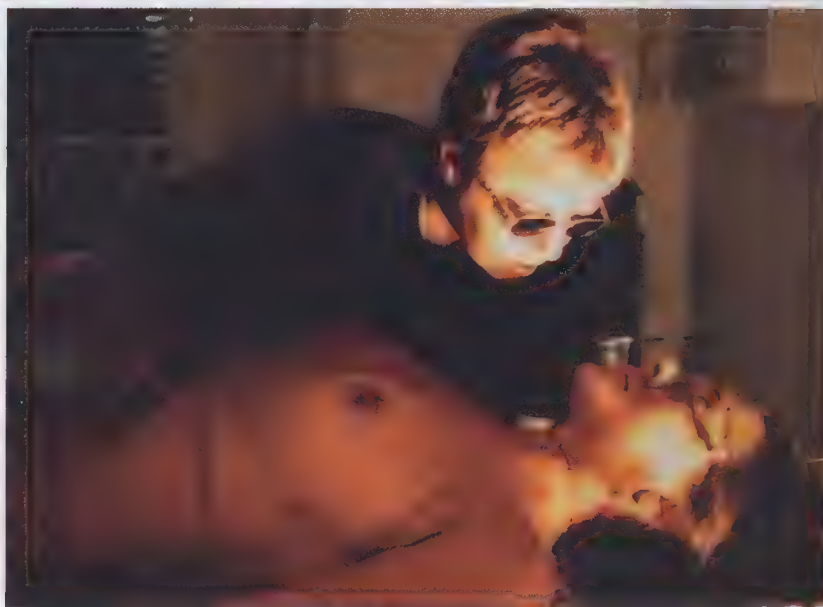
Synopsis: *Whenever Moira Frankenstein listens to her favourite Ubangis album she has visions of her dead father, the famous Dr. Frankenstein, entreating her to revive his experiments, specifically a beautiful female monster called 'Goddess'. Moira goes back to the family mansion, where her stepmother Abigail openly has sex in front of her with the gardener. Moira succeeds in reviving the female monster, but it immediately becomes intensely aroused and craves sex from Moira. But when the creature realises that Moira has affairs with other women, it becomes violently jealous. Meanwhile, we discover that Moira was the victim of sexual abuse from her father and Abigail, who used to force her into incestuous threesomes with them...*

Review: This third creation for One Shot Productions is a frustrating near-miss. There's a genuinely strange and sexy film here, but it's being throttled by terrible sound, indecipherable dialogue, stilted or just terrible acting, ill-fitting music, and an overabundance of post-production fx which render the image at best indistinct, at worst incomprehensible. *Lust for Frankenstein*

was apparently lensed on Super-16mm, but as with *Tender Flesh*, extensive post-production gives everything a messy, smudgy video appearance. Beneath these surface disfigurements are some interesting ideas and performances, but when all of the deficiencies strike at once it's heavy going.

Lust for Frankenstein has a great central concept: Frankenstein's daughter, Moira, creates a female monster who turns out to be a lesbian nymphomaniac, obsessed with bedding her creator. Moira, who was abused during childhood by her father, falls in love with her buxom monster, which leaves the way open for a sexy, sapphic and sentimental variant on the Frankenstein mythology, as well as a respite from the rather shopworn notion of lesbian vampires. The film gets another shot in the arm thanks to a committed and genuine performance by Michelle Bauer as the Monster. Statuesque, shapely and imposing in her six-inch-heeled gold boots, she gives *Lust for Frankenstein* an emotional core, indeed a reason for being. With facial expressions conveying suppressed lust, passion, rage and seething jealousy, she sells the central concept despite a blizzard of bad creative decisions surrounding her. Her scenes with Lina Romay, who also knows how to deliver a focussed performance under trying conditions, offer a ray of light by which the viewer can navigate. The stand-out scene is the one in which Moira finds the nude and sexually frustrated Monster hugging a tree in the garden, rubbing her clitoris against it while watching a gardener stripped to the waist chopping wood nearby. The Monster begs Moira to masturbate her, and Moira duly does so, as the man chops heedlessly away. The ambience of sexual heat, derangement and frustration is beautifully caught by Bauer. Yes, the gardener is wielding his modestly sized axe in a style more suited to a big old log-splitter, which makes him look ridiculous rather than potently masculine, but that's Franco for you. The fact that Bauer could retain her professionalism and dignity while walking nude through a film of dime-store special effects and half-assed supporting players is testimony to her focus and determination.

On the subject of 'special effects', you may have noticed in this book that I rarely take Franco to task for unconvincing illusions: indeed, I've argued that sometimes they are part of the mad charm of his work. Here, though, the operation 'scars' on Michelle Bauer's Monster are actually just elastic bands with fake 'stitches' stuck on; the tightness against the skin is meant to sell the illusion, but one is irresistibly reminded of Andy Milligan's bizarrely atrocious riff on the Frankenstein story, *Monstrosity* (1987). Best to concentrate on Bauer's face, where the real work is being done to bolster Franco's fragile illusions. It's just a pity that the same cannot be said for the actress's voice, which is compromised, through no fault of her own, by the addition of an audio effect used in dozens of primarily witless films to suggest the otherworldly. The effect (called a harmonizer) electronically doubles any input and shifts it up or down in pitch in synch with the original signal. Used on the human voice it swiftly became everybody's favourite push-button shortcut for intimations of demonic possession in the horror films of the 1980s. It was also routinely used to deepen the voices of monsters



TOP: Moira Frankenstein (Lina Romay) disciplines her jealous 'monster' (Michelle Bauer) as stepmother Abigail (Analia Ivars) looks on in horror.
 BOTTOM LEFT: Moira and Goddess get rid of Moira's irritating boyfriend Cyrus (Robert King).
 BOTTOM RIGHT: Moira revivifies Goddess.



to make them sound more threatening. Like most technical quick fixes, though, it's unconvincing, not to mention clichéd as hell. The device was incredibly old hat by the time of *Lust for Frankenstein*, so it doesn't even have the dubious merits of novelty. Instead of deepening Bauer's voice and making her more imposing, it makes her sound like a bad *Doctor Who* monster circa 1985...

As for the film's barrage of post-production optical effects, their sheer indiscriminate ugliness leads the sympathetic viewer into a quandary. What did Franco see in them? What could have motivated this headlong dive into the post-production paint-box? It's a particularly difficult pill to swallow given his prior disdain for opticals. He was unhappy, for instance, with the post-production fx on *Venus in Furs*, which at least had the virtue of a highly professional opticals house at the helm. Here, he seems gung-ho to click every available button in the video effects toolbar. The excesses of *Venus in Furs* look positively Bressonian by comparison. *Lust for Frankenstein*, like *Vampire Blues* and *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell*, is among the more heavily processed of the One Shot films. Others, like *Red Silk*, *Blind Target* and *Broken Dolls*, either downplay or abandon this approach. The only film in which these electronic treatments have some conceptual validity is *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* (see review). Sadly, in *Lust for Frankenstein* no conceptual or aesthetic principle guides Franco's hand; he is simply attempting to 'jazz up' the footage. While some may hail his approach as 'experimental', for me it's an experiment that ought to have been terminated right here. Instead it was repeated on five or six more films, which casts an unwelcome digital fug over the next few years of Franco's work.

Had it been made in the early 1970s, when Jess Franco's creativity was at white heat, *Lust for Frankenstein* could have joined *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* at the forefront of horror-erotica. Instead, with its garishly unpleasant video effects and amateur supporting cast, it's a film that strays perilously close to throwing away both its intriguing premise and the skills of its two leading ladies.

Franco on screen: Franco dubs the voice of Dr. Frankenstein. It's a pity he didn't play the character on screen too, because then we would have been spared the wacky performance of music entrepreneur Carlos Subterfuge (aka Carlos Galán), who gives us the first, and one sincerely hopes the last, dreadlocked Goth-punk version of Mary Shelley's Faustian scientist.

Cast and crew: Michelle Bauer, speaking to Joe Vannicola of Evil-Dread.com, was effusive in her praise for Franco: "I really adored that man. I'd love to work for him again. He had some very different ideas about things [...] He had neat ideas and he was off the beaten path [...] All I had to do was just go, 'You know what? I'm just respecting what you're doing here.' [...] He would change things as he went. I never really pinned him down and I never saw the outcome of any of the films. But I liked working for him."¹

Music: With the exception of some familiar Daniel White cues ("Basse profonde" for instance) most of the music is provided by The Ubangis, a 'Psychopunkatrashabilly' band formed in Washington D.C. in 1990 by Brian Horrorwitz. Interviewed in

Brutarian Magazine in 2001, Horrorwitz explained how they came to work on Franco's films: "Steve and Nancy knew the guy that produces Franco's films now. Since Steve's cartoon cover for the Cramps' LP [Bad Music For Bad People] he has done other covers and, more recently, promotional art for the films *Tender Flesh* and *Mari-Cookie* and the *Killer Tarantula*. So I gave Franco's producer The Ubangis CD simply because Nancy was on the cover and he was friends with them. Then we got a call a couple of weeks later asking to use tracks in *Lust for Frankenstein* which we had just finished [...] And then a few months later, I get a call from him asking if I could write a few original songs for his new film *Vampire Blues*."²

Locations: Málaga.

Connections: Another grating aspect is the trite self-referentiality of having Moira Frankenstein wear a T-shirt emblazoned with artwork for Franco's 1967 film *Necronomicon*. Later we see film posters for *Killer Barbys*, *Downtown Heat*, *Las chicas del tanga*, and the cover art for the CD compilation *The CrazyWorld Of Jess Franco* on Moira's bedroom wall. While Franco's films have always been riddled with 'in-jokes' and narrative references to his earlier work, this kind of flippant (and let's face it, random) 'postmodernism' only serves to diminish an already fragile fictional world. You can tell when an actor is not 'in the zone', and the same goes for a director. Here, instead of concentrating on world-building, Franco leans out of the frame, as it were, making facile gestures to his cult audience which can only weaken the viability of the film at hand ... In a nod to the classic Jack Pierce make-up, Michelle Bauer sports a pair of gold-painted bolts glued to her neck, à la Boris Karloff.

Other versions: There are two cuts of the film; the European version running 87 minutes, and the American cut running 79 minutes. The latter removes a lot of dubbed-over muttering from Jess Franco himself as Dr. Frankenstein, although given that his voice is swamped with an audio effect that turns him into grumbling electro-porridge, it's really not much of a loss.

DR. WONG'S VIRTUAL HELL

(USA DVD title)

USA & Spain, 1998

Alternative titles

El infierno virtual del Dr. Wong (SP DVD)

Production companies

One Shot Productions (USA)

Manacoa Films (SP)

Video/DVD distributor

Sub Rosa Studios (USA)

Timeline

Shooting period	1998
SP 'Vellavision' DVD	2002
US DVD release	28 March 2006

Running time

SP 'Impacto' DVD	97m10s
US 'Sub Rosa' DVD	97m03s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. producers: **Kevin Collins**, **Peter J. Evanko**. associate producers: **Hugh Gallagher**, **Karen Wong**. music: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Raquel Cabra** [actually **Jess Franco**]. editing and visual effects: **Juan José Villar**. make-up: **Eva I. Salcedo**. production manager: **Josh Kalman**. 1st assistant director: **Pedro Temboury** [as 'Peter Tamboury']. stills photographer: **Emilio Schargorodsky**. camera assistant: **A. Renford**. electricians: **Benito Carles**, **A. Alazred**. best boy: **Juan Murten**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Joaquín Phre']. graphics: **Cucho de Paz**. direct sound: **B. Summerville**, **P. Canijo**. laboratories: **M.T.T.C. Singen**. technical supplies: **CTI**. negative: **Eastman Kodak**. for **One Shot Productions (USA)**: **Joseph Amatore**, **Steven Blickenstaff**, **Tim Greaves**, **Brian Horrorwitz**, **Darrin Person**. Songs: "Dr. Wong's Hell" and "Mr. Nobody Blues" composed by **Jess Franco**, performed by **Shawen**. "My Fly" composed and performed by **Shawen**. "Pianosideral – Monologues for Vina and Cithara" composed and performed by **Daniel J. White**. Thanks and appreciation to: **Mr. Javier Ramirez**, **Silicon Artist** (Madrid, Spain), **Tivoli World** (Benalmádena, Spain), **Apartamentos Bajondillo** (Torremolinos, Spain), **Apartahotel Sol Aloha** (Benalmádena, Spain), **J. Douglas Wentworth** (New Jersey, USA). *additional credits from One-Shot website*: Virtual Dance Locations: **Midnight Raven**. Virtual Dance Choreography: **Linn Sukiaki**.

Cast: **Jess Franco** (Dr. James Wong). **Analía Ivars** (Loba). **Howard Vernon** (Cagliostro). **Lina Romay** [as 'Candice Coster'] (Nelly Smith & Tsai Ming). **Pedro Temboury** [as 'Peter Temboury'] (Doc Petrie). **Raquel Cabra** [as 'Rachel Sheppard'] (Rita). **Robert King** (Wilfred). **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Joaquín Phre'] (Doorman). **Tommy Chase** (First Guy in Virtual Reality Bar). **Sol Clink** (Second Guy in Virtual Reality Bar). *additional credits from One-Shot website*: **Casey Yip** (She Dragon Dancer).

Synopsis: *The evil Dr. Wong, tired and disillusioned after decades of failure, is about to commit harakiri. His daughter Tsai Ming intervenes, and suggests a last ditch plan to make them both rich: they will kidnap a millionaire's daughter and demand a ransom. Using virtual reality, Tsai Ming hypnotises the millionaire. When he comes round, he receives a message from Tsai Ming via his television: two million dollars for the*

safe return of his daughter, or else she will be trapped forever in Dr. Wong's virtual hell. Two inept but persistent detectives, Nelly Smith and Doc Petrie, manage to disrupt the doctor's plans, with the help of Cagliostro, a magician whose powers stretch out from beyond the grave...

Production notes: Described on the producer's website as "The infamous 'lost' One Shot film", this marks the only co-production between Kevin Collins' company and Franco's long-standing solo production house Manacoa Films. Oddly, *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* sat on the shelf for four years, before emerging on DVD from Vellavision in Spain in 2002. A further four years later it was released in the USA, rather ignominiously, as an 'extra' on the Sub Rosa DVD of Franco's *Snakewoman*. Pedro Temboury confirmed in an online discussion at the Franconomicon site that the film was made at the same time as *Vampire Blues*: "This was the fourth, if I remember correctly, that [Franco] did in Malaga in this last stage. If in the first three we looked like a conventional film shoot, filmed in super-16, with a team of about fifteen people, in *Dr. Wong* and *Vampire Blues*, which were made 'back-to-back' as Jess likes to say, the technical team was reduced to five and recorded on video, I think the first in that format."¹

Point a 35mm camera at even the most banal location and you will find, when you watch the footage, that it has entered the charmed world of cinema. Nothing is so ordinary that it cannot be transformed, alchemised, projected through a cine-aperture into the parallel world of film. At 24 frames a second, film confers an immaculate aesthetic distance – no matter how rude or lowly the material. Celluloid is a magic veil – it imparts transcendence to the things you see through it. Video images, on the other hand, have no 'veil'. It doesn't matter if you're looking at a sexy vampire lady sucking blood in the Carpathians, or a junkie shooting up in a multi-storey car-park: there is no transcendence, no transmutation. There is only detail, relentless and unmediated. The Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos, who shot his art-house hit *The Lobster* digitally, but returned to film for *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, put it like this: "I don't want to shoot digitally again, if at all possible. I like the fact that film transforms the image into something different, usually more beautiful. But even when film is ugly, it is ugly in a transcendent way."² Occasionally, experiments with lighting and degradation of the image can find a way across the abyss between film and video (David Lynch's *Inland Empire*), and by foregrounding technical paraphernalia and skilfully simulating 'real life' you can make a virtue of the flatness of the image (*The Blair Witch Project*). In the last ten years, state-of-the-art post-production has brought the two realms so close together that the abyss is almost invisible. But we're talking about the late 1990s and early 2000s here. Franco lacked the money for the best techno tools, and besides, they were still in their infancy. Consequently most of his video work was stranded in a cheap-looking digital purgatory. The projects Franco made between 1998 and 2012 vary in their approach to the problem, and some are more successful than others, but underlying all of them is one central problem. Video footage in its raw state looks –

to speak as bluntly as Franco – like shit. The decision Franco took to ‘corrode’ the surface of his video-films with optical effects was clearly an attempt to rectify this. And frankly, he rarely succeeded. In *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell*, however, he does at least find witty and plausible ways to contextualise what we see...

Review: Forty-five minutes of story meets fifty minutes of sexy dancing in this daft but surprisingly enjoyable skitter through the trappings of the Fu Manchu movie cycle. If such a balance sounds unsustainable, remember that we are now firmly in the digital era of Franco’s work, so no one will ever have to watch this opus without a remote control to hand. Oh, the mercies of modern technology... I approached *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell* with trepidation. Jess Franco ‘does’ virtual reality, on videotape, with a One Shot budget, while rummaging through his favourite ‘Yellow Peril’ clichés? The omens were not auspicious. I have to say, though, that while I succumbed to the lure of the fast forward button a few times in the middle section of the film, I found the rest quite amusing, especially as Franco fires off all sorts of allusions to his earlier work.

It’s impossible to discuss *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell* without mentioning the multitude of other texts to which it refers. The titular ‘Dr. Wong’ points back to Franco’s *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* (1982), in which he also played the title role. Both films purloin their lead character’s name from a musty old Monogram release: *The Mysterious Mr. Wong* (1934) starring Bela Lugosi. In spirit, however, *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell* is designed to echo the 1960s Fu Manchu films, two of which – *The Blood of Fu Manchu* and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* – Franco directed. Dr. Wong is therefore simply a public domain fig-leaf for that more (in)famous Oriental villain. There’s no doubt he’s meant to be the same person: Wong refers to the previous humiliating defeats he has suffered, including a failed attempt to freeze the Caribbean Sea which Fu Manchu attempted in *The Castle of Fu Manchu*. Best of all is the scene in which Wong tries to remember ‘his’ famous catchphrase (“*The world shall hear from me again*”) but owing to advanced senility gets it pathetically wrong (“*The world will be informed of all I want to do!*”).

It’s not just the villainous Fu Manchu who’s swirling around in the pot here; his dogged opponents are referenced too. Nayland Smith, the doughty British hero played by Richard Greene in the sixties films, is replaced here by Lina Romay as Nelly Smith. No, Nayland hasn’t had a sex change, Nelly is his daughter! Romay plays two roles in the film; she’s also Wong’s daughter Tsai Ming, who helps him just as Fu Manchu was assisted by his devoted daughter Lin Tang. (In *The Mysterious Dr. Wong* the villain had a niece, but she was a goodie-goodie rather than a chip off the old block). The character name ‘Tsai Ming’ echoes Tsai Chin, the actress who played Lin Tang. Nelly Smith also enlists the help of her boyfriend, ‘Doc Petrie’, presumably the son of Doctor Ronald Petrie, played by Howard Marion-Crawford in the Fu Manchu films. “*My father and uncle have killed him at least twenty times. But he never dies,*” says Nelly when discussing Dr. Wong with her young beau. This raises

a question: does she mean Doctor Petrie when she says ‘uncle’? Nayland Smith and Doctor Petrie were inseparable friends in the Fu Manchu films; if Petrie is Nelly’s uncle, then Smith must at some point have married Petrie’s sister, making the two men brothers-in-law. This previously undisclosed back-story has the additional side-effect of making Nelly’s boyfriend her cousin – thus allowing Franco to squeeze some incest into the picture!

Also helping Nelly in her fight against Dr. Wong is the exotic figure of Cagliostro, a megalomaniacal mesmerist and magician last seen in Franco’s *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972) and *Les Gloutonnes* (1973). Time seems to have mellowed him considerably; in days gone by he would have been the wicked Wong’s ally, not a helpmate for the good guys. But if time has wrought changes to his character, his appearance hasn’t altered in the least. That’s because Franco boldly incorporates shots from *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, so that Howard Vernon can ‘live again’ in the Franco universe. He’s dubbed by someone else of course, with lines more suited to his new role, but it’s thrilling and strangely touching to see his wide-eyed gaze again. We’re even shown, for a few sweet seconds, the great mesmerist standing on the balcony of his magnificent castle, the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães in Cascais. He also gains a first name, although one has to say it doesn’t really fit with his image: ‘Johnny Cagliostro’ is about as far removed from plausibility as ‘Freddy Fu Manchu’ or ‘Barry Orloff’. Disrespectful? I don’t think so. Bearing in mind Franco’s great regard for his erstwhile leading man, and noting the onscreen dedication “To Howard Vernon” at the end, we can be sure that it was done with affection, and would probably have inspired a roar of laughter from the actor himself.

Wilfred, the millionaire father of a teenage girl abducted by Wong, watches TV while waiting for news from the kidnappers. As luck would have it, he tunes in to a screening of Jess Franco’s *Esclavas del crimen* (1986). Yet another hymn to all things ersatz Oriental, it featured Romay played the daughter of Fu Manchu, although to avoid too great an intertextual strain on *Dr. Wong’s* ramshackle reality, all that Wilfred sees is *Esclavas del crimen’s* hero, played by acting unknown Marco Moriarty, karate-kicking a couple of thugs.

In one of two stylistic nods to other media (the second being virtual reality, of which more in a moment), comic-book speech bubbles are digitally superimposed over the action here and there, reminding us of the similarly attired *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1966) and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte* (1984), in which Franco used the device to lend a farcical or ironic dimension to live action comedy-adventures. But whereas the comic speech bubbles in those films felt rather lame and poorly integrated, here they work much better. There’s a real commitment to the notion of comic-book graphics, and the technological tools are at hand to lend the film an authentic comic-strip look. The best example is the scene in which Nelly and Petrie approach the lair of Dr. Wong. Nelly feels the supernatural evil of the villain encroaching her consciousness, at which point the image takes on a heavily stylised colour overlay. Motion is

supplanted by a series of still images, and the two continue their conversation in speech bubbles.

Nelly: I have a terrible premonition.

Petrie: I don't believe in premonitions.

Nelly: You are wrong. We are confronting the mysterious world of the East.

Petrie: You're shaking.

Nelly: I feel a hateful magnetism surrounding us.

With this, the image of Nelly's face starts to move again. "*The ominous Dr. Wong is alive and very close. I can feel his deadly magnetism,*" she says, suggesting that in diegetic terms this comic-strip interlude was caused by the arcane magic of the villain. It's this that makes the video fx of *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* feel integrated with the story, whereas they aren't in films like *Lust for Frankenstein*. Franco's two-pronged justification for swamping the image with digital fx (comic strip aesthetics and Dr. Wong's malign magic) covers all bases and means that we can stop regarding these electronic colourisations as some kind of artsy imposition or a technological band-aid for the ugliness of videotape. By drawing form and content together in a playfully intelligent way, the film gains a thematic and aesthetic coherence missing from many of the other films in this period.

Franco is folding together three layers of communication here: comic-strip aesthetics, the notion of virtual reality, and the mass of intertextual references which constitute the 'plot'. It's interesting that comic-strips are an example of a discrete 'world' or alternative medium for which Franco had often shown love and admiration before. *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, from which he draws the footage of Howard Vernon, is an especially apposite connection, drawing as it does quite explicitly on the tradition of the fumetti (sexy and violent comic strips from Italy). The use of comic-strip iconography such as speech bubbles, and colour processing designed to simulate the two-strip colour of comic books, is a direct link to the notion of 'other worlds'. 'Virtual reality' on the other hand, is a concept which was gaining currency among tech-orientated media commentators in the run-up to the millennium. Franco visualises it as the means by which we will watch pornography in the future, which let's be honest remains as likely a market tentpole now as it was then. However, his attitude to this proposed new technology is surprisingly ambivalent. On the one hand he can see the appeal of a brand new technological window for sexy spectacle; essentially offering his usual footage of girls wiggling at the camera, with optical filters to suggest the technosphere. On the other hand he's rather sceptical, one might almost say stick-in-the-mud, about it: "*They call it art but it's only porno,*" complains one VR user. "*Virtual reality? It's just a dirty show!*" says another. A row of three VR users comment one after the other: "*I definitely like virtual reality,*" says one; "*It's better than reality,*" chirps another; "*Zzzzzzzzz,*" snores a third.

To access the 'virtual hell' of Dr. Wong, characters in the film must don special glasses. Perhaps the funniest and creepiest element

of the film, these glasses have photographic images of human eyes stuck over the lenses, giving those who wear them a very peculiar countenance indeed. This oddity and comic strangeness echoes one of Franco's best films of the 1980s, *El sexo està loco*, which showed a group of silver aliens putting on a nude sex show in a nightclub for the delectation of an audience wearing rubber jokestore masks. In both cases the effect is comical but also unsettling. In *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* these glasses suggest alienation and displacement; one senses a certain animus towards the technology, underlying which is the echo of Franco's similarly negative take on drug use. He seems to be drawing a parallel between the drug experience, for which he often expressed contempt, and being swallowed up by immersion in a simulated world. If this is an accurate summary of his position, then the multiple references to his other work here, as well as the blatant video effects and numerous fourth-wall breaking asides ("*I know all about [Wong]. I've seen all the movies,*" says Petrie) are expressions of a Godardian desire to subvert one's immersion in a fiction, by forcing us to stand back and acknowledge the artificiality of the experience, thus holding on to conscious awareness. Which is all very well, but what do the virtual reality glasses show to these poor deluded customers? Fifty minutes of sexy gyration, filmed in the style for which Jess Franco is famous! This seems rather like having your Brechtian cake and eating it, with fantasy icing on top. Perhaps what's really at play here is simply the resistance to change of an older man, who has dedicated his life to one medium above all, and now reads about the supposed obsolescence of that medium at the dawn of virtual reality. Twenty years later and we're no closer to VR usurping the movies, so let's put this matter aside and write it off as an example of how easily contemporary sci-fi dates...

There's fun to be had with this film, but there's also way too much treading of water, masquerading as sexy softcore. As if to prove that VR is a wasteful squandering of human consciousness, by far the weakest aspect of the film is the supposedly erotic virtual reality sequence, which squats like a giant techno toad in the middle of the film and gobbles up fifty minutes of one's valuable time. Better get used to it, though, if you intend to push on through Franco's post One Shot films, many of which dispense with plot altogether and play like *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* without the wraparound story...

Franco on screen: Cheerfully playing a stereotypical Chinese supervillain, with a mouth full of comedy false teeth and not a care in the world for racial sensitivities, Franco is unlikely to be hailed for his thoughtful reimagining of the 'Yellow Peril' stereotype. On the other hand, if anyone can make it through this film in a straight-faced rage about racism and cultural appropriation, they're more of a danger to the world than Sax Rohmer ever was.

Cast and crew: Analía Ivars puts in the fourth of her six appearances in Franco's 1990s films, here playing Loba, Lina Romy's sexy sidekick, who becomes the central attraction in the 'virtual hell' segment. She also appears as the sexually voracious Furia in *Tender Flesh*, the heroine's rich bitch stepmother in *Lust*





for *Frankenstein*, and 'Queen Vicious' in *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula in 8 Legs to Love You*. She followed *Dr. Wong* with a starring role as Countess Irina von Murnau in *Vampire Blues* ... With financing coming from One Shot Productions in the USA, it was important for the American producers to have a reliable Spanish production manager overseeing and co-ordinating things on the ground. Enter Pedro Temboury, whose short film *Psycholletes* (about a gang of biker girls who castrate and murder men) had been bought by French distributors Canal Plus. In 1996, while attending various festivals with his film, Temboury met Jess Franco, who was promoting *Killer Barbys* at the time. By now Franco had settled permanently in Málaga, Temboury's home town. The two struck up a friendly and supportive relationship, and Temboury took on the roles of production manager and assistant director on Franco's *Tender Flesh*, *Lust for Frankenstein*, *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell* and *Vampire Blues*. Franco in turn appeared onscreen in Temboury's knockabout exploitation comedies *Kárate a muerte en Torremolinos* (2003), *See you later Cowabunga: La maldición del cenachero diabólico!* (2004), and *Ellos robaron la picha de Hitler* aka *They Stole Hitler's Dick* (2006).

Music: It's great to hear once again a very odd Gamelan-influenced piece by Daniel White, which was originally used for the opium-smoking sequence in *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964) before emerging a few years later on White's library LP *Monologue Pour...* (1972), under the title "Monologue Pour Gong" ... Also making an appearance are "Reflets de Chine" and "Reflets du Pakistan" from White's *Musique Pour...* (1968), and "Monologue Pour Tablas 2" from yet another album called *Monologue Pour...* released in 1976. Altogether there were four Daniel J. White library LPs with this same title! The clip from *Esclavas del crimen* is freshly dubbed over with "Hors D'haleine" from the Daniel White LP *Mystère Bleuté*.

Locations: Torremolinos and Benalmádena, Spain. Dr. Wong's 'lair' is a meeting room at the Apartamentos Torre De La Roca in Torremolinos. For the Chinese-style exterior of Wong's base, Franco chose a Chinese-style pavilion that formed part of the amusement park called Tivoli World in Benalmádena, just a short walk up the coast from the Castillo de Bil-Bil used in *Mil sexos tiene la noche*. The ornate and fantastical palace used to signify the home of 'Johnny Cagliostro' is the Castillo Monumento Colomares in Benalmádena. Despite appearances, there was no second unit sent to Thailand; instead Franco recycled footage of Bangkok and Pattaya collected by Juan Soler in 1984 for the back-to-back productions *Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido* and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*.

Connections: In a film virtually composed of connections to Franco's past work, there's not a lot to add here that hasn't been mentioned above. Perhaps we can use this opportunity to wonder, with a shudder of dismay, why Lina Romay decided to voice Tsai Ming with the same squeaky-cutesy voice she used for the talking asshole in *El ojete de Luli* (1985) ... Several sequences in 'virtual hell' are scored to a mixture of music and echoed voices, the latter

simply looping the phrase "67, 69, 3-5" at various speeds like some arcane code. Is it meant to summon memories of the opening theme to *Vampyros Lesbos*, with its heavily processed voice reeling off impenetrable 'news from nowhere'?

VAMPIRE BLUES

(US video/DVD title)

USA, 1998

© 1999 One Shot Productions

Alternative titles

Los blues del vampiro (SP video/DVD)

Vampyr Blues (alt. SP)

Vampire Sex (trailer title)

Vampire Sex – Lady Dracula 3 (GER)

Production companies

One Shot Productions (USA)

Los Dos Hombres (USA)

Video/DVD distributor

Sub Rosa Studios (USA)

VellaVisión (SP)

Timeline

Shooting date	1998
US release copyright	2000
SP 'Impacto Films' DVD	2002
SP 'Vellavisión' re-issue	July 2010

Running time

SP DVD	90m45s
US 'One Shot' DVD	67m48s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. producers: **Kevin Collins, Peter J. Evanko**. associate producers: **Hugh Gallagher, Karen Wong**. music: **Jess Franco, Daniel J. White**. incidental music: **Brian Horrorwitz** [and uncredited **Randy Manos**]. *Vampire Blues* Alternate Themes by **Brian Horrorwitz** performed by **The Ubangis** © 1998 Trash Palace. director of photography: **Raquel Cabra** [actually **Jess Franco**]. on-line editor and effects: **Juan José Villar**. make-up: **Eva I. Salcedo**. production manager: **Josh Kalman**. 1st assistant director: **Pedro Temboury**. stills photographer: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'E. Sharchgorosky']. camera assistant: **A. Renford**. electricians: **Benito Carles, A. Alazred**. best boy: **Juan Murten**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Joaquín Phre']. direct

sound: **B. Summerville, P. Canijo.** digital stereo sound: **J.J. Gonzales.** laboratories: **M.T.T.C. Singen.** digital sound editing: **Manaco Lab Spain.** for **One Shot Productions (USA): Joseph Amatore, Steven Blickenstaff, Tim Greaves, Brian Horrorwitz, Darrin Person.** additional credits from *One-Shot website*: line producers (One Shot, USA): **Darrin Person, Tim Greaves.** theme song performed by **The Ubangis (Brian Horrorwitz and Randy Manos).** written by **Brian Horrorwitz & Randy Manos.** produced by **Carl Merson.** re-edited by **Jess Franco.** copyright 1998 **Trash Palace.** American version edited and prepared by **Kevin Collins.** Produced by **One Shot Productions.** Editing: **Horizon Video (New York)** and **Sun Stone Video (Union City, New Jersey).** Special thanks to **Karen Wong** and **Peter J. Evanko.**

Cast: **Raquel Cabra** [as 'Rachel Sheppard'] (Rachel Crosby). **Analia Ivars** (Countess Irina von Murnau). **Lina Romay** (Marga, a Gypsy Fortune-teller). **Jess Franco** (the merchant). **Peter Temboury** (the knave). additional credits from *One-Shot website*: American voice artists: **Jessica Luo** (Rachel Crosby). **Leyora Zuberman** (Countess Irina von Murnau).

Synopsis: *A lonely young woman on vacation in Málaga spends her days sunbathing on the beach, or walking along the seafront. Never speaking to anyone, she drifts without aim or purpose. Gradually she becomes aware of a lurking presence tracking her every move. The Countess Irina, a vampire, has spotted Rachel, recognised her loneliness and vulnerability, and intends to take advantage of her. While shopping along the seafront, Rachel stops at a small tourist stall and buys a screenprinted T-shirt emblazoned with a picture of a vampire woman; unbeknown to her it depicts the Countess Irina. When at last Rachel is drawn into the Countess's embrace, at her mansion, they spend a night of lesbian passion together. The next day, Rachel goes to a gypsy fortune-teller's afternoon show at a venue on the seafront. The gypsy, called Marga, immediately detects a malign agency holding Rachel prisoner. Sensing the mark of a vampire, Marga offers to help the young woman. Summoning her magic, which involves the ceremonial blessing of a giant black phallus, she sets off to Irina's mansion, gathering various leaves and herbs on the way, and taking Rachel with her. They confront the Countess, but the vampire seems to get the upper hand, and Marga appears overwhelmed, throwing Rachel onto the vampire's bed as though sacrificing the woman she was supposed to be helping. It's all a ruse, however; when the two women are rolling around having sex, Marga waits until Irina is on top and then plunges the black ceremonial dildo into the vampire's vagina. Thus 'staked', Irina expires in agony... Rachel awakens from sleep; she is still sitting on the beach where she had been before. Was it all just a dream? So it seems, until she looks at the T-shirt she'd purchased earlier. Instead of a picture of the Countess Irina, it features a photograph of herself with vampire fangs...*

Production notes: Filmed back-to-back with *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell*, with which it shares a couple of locations, *Vampire Blues* was

made, despite what the credits say, with a crew of just five: Joaquín Sánchez Miranda (aka 'Joaquín Phre'), Raquel Cabra, Emilio Schargorodsky, Pedro Temboury and a friend called Manolo. The shooting of both films took just two weeks; a similar schedule to the one that produced Franco's brace of *Maciste* films in 1973. Much of the film was shot on a Mini DV Video Camera; the Panasonic 3CCD Zoom Digital 500X.

Review: Toiling beneath the perennial problems of the One Shot era is this haunting excursion into mood and menace. Minimalist even by Franco standards, *Vampire Blues* has only three narrative elements: a lonely woman on holiday by the sea; a predatory lesbian vampire stalking her; and a gypsy fortune-teller who decides to help the victim. Very little happens, but Franco spins out the lonely wanderings of his heroine and gives the film a fragile sort of magic, harking back to his early 1980s exercises in gloomy minimalism.

Sadly, a potentially atmospheric project sags beneath a host of encumbrances. Worst of all is the decision to shoot on videotape, a constant thorn in the flesh of Franco's later work which doesn't really help when you're aiming for a strange and dislocated atmosphere: a less oneiric medium is hard to imagine. Have you ever woken up and tried to describe a dream, only for the cold light of day to make what was weird and marvellous sound empty and banal? Film is the dream; video is the cold light of day... Then there's the music of The Ubangis, whose cheerfully rough-hewn brand of shockabilly is completely unsuited to a melancholy film like this. On screen, Franco is spinning a ninety-minute tone poem about lust and loneliness; on the soundtrack the band are plowing an exuberant fifties rock'n'roll groove with their horror-loving tongues firmly in cheek. These are two completely different emotional flavours, and they don't really belong on the same plate.

Vampire Blues is Raquel Cabra's most prominent role for Jess Franco, and she's ideally suited to the part. She moves with a sombre pensiveness that makes you worry for her as she strays into danger. Apart from Lina Romay, she's probably the most compelling female presence in the One Shot films. Having started off working behind the camera, her lack of acting experience is noticeable from time to time, although it really only shows in a handful of scenes, for instance when we see her asleep on the beach, head tossing this way and that in the throes of an uneasy dream. Suddenly she wakes, and sits upright in shock. We've seen this countless times in Franco's cinema, it's one of the leitmotifs of his supernatural tales: the dreamer shocked awake by a dream too terrible for sleep, only to find the real world equally frightening. Cabra however could have done with a few more takes, in fact what we see looks more like an actor's run-through before the camera starts rolling. You would have thought that shooting on video would allow for more takes to get things right, but instead Franco worked at the same breakneck pace, as though film were rattling through the camera! This may have been because of the shockingly low budgets involved, but it also suggests that Franco was addicted to filming at speed, even when he could possibly have taken more



time. Nevertheless, Cabra's introverted acting fits with the mood of the film and makes her a plausible weaker soul for the vampire to prey upon. It's just a shame that she's dubbed in the English-language version by someone called Jessica Luo, who squeaks her few lines of dialogue as if deliberately sending up the actress.

Analia Ivars, who plays the wonderfully named Countess Irina von Murnau, had already worked with Franco many times, starting with *Los blues de la calle Pop* and *El hundimiento de la casa Usher* in 1982. She's usually reliable, even in the video productions (she's enjoyably sleazy for instance in *Lust for Frankenstein*), which makes her performance here all the more puzzling. Perhaps influenced by the American actresses turning up in Franco's nineties work, she plays the part as though she's onstage at a fetish club on Goth Night (or a goth club on Fetish Night). Why does she constantly look at the camera? What possible good can it do, in a film of this sort, for the villainess to glower 'seductively' into the lens, snarling and baring her teeth as if posing for the cover of *Draculina* or *Scream Queens Illustrated*? The worst instance comes when Irina bites her live-in love slave, played by production manager and organisational lynch-pin Pedro Temboury; Franco has the actress look up from the victim's bloodied neck and stare straight down the camera lens, snarling 'sexily' with bloodied teeth. This sort of thing might float a few boats when printed on a pull-out magazine poster, but it doesn't belong in a movie. It's so tacky that it seriously jeopardises one's attempt to believe in the film. Such a self-consciously performative version of female sexuality is a recurring canker in Franco's video productions. I'm well aware of the modernist tradition of Brechtian alienation, I have supped my fill of art cinema in this mode, but I find this persistent urge to break the fourth wall annoying and incoherent. By way of illustration, let's compare *Vampire Blues* with *Vampyros Lesbos*, Franco's first sapphic vampire tale, made in 1970. When the stunning Soledad Miranda looked into the lens, she did so just once, while performing her nightclub routine; in other words, her stage performance justifies her gaze to camera. She doesn't just stare down the lens for no reason. The same thing goes for 'sexy dancing'. In *Vampyros Lesbos*, Soledad Miranda dances during her nightclub act, but when she's off-stage she's cool, elegant and composed. In *Vampire Blues*, when Rachel enters the Murnau mansion, she finds the Countess dancing in her boudoir like a cable-TV sex worker, performing sundry 'erotic gesticulations' in lieu of an introduction. This is all delivered straight to camera, with Ivars making eye contact with the lens. It's a mode of address heavily influenced by horror magazine photospreads featuring blood-drenched naked babes, and it means that instead of imaginatively entering the world of the film we stand at the portal of our TV screens, being eyeballed by 'hot chicks' who are selling the wrong product: not immersion in a fictional world but a fraudulent promise of sex aimed directly at the consumer. Hot babes, panting consumers, who needs fiction? Cut out the middle man.

In *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell*, shot back-to-back with *Vampire Blues*, Franco established a link between the digital degradation of the

image and the theme of the film. Here, the same post-production tinkering has no such coherence. The first major blaze of optical fx occurs when Rachel meets Countess Irina; is it meant to be a representation of the vampire's magnetism, the power of her will? If so, what about the next day when Rachel attends a fortune-teller's show, and the room and everyone in it is swamped with patches of electric blue? Is this how Rachel now sees the world after a night of vampire sex? Sadly not: the reverse angle shots of Rachel in the audience are also coloured blue. In other words, no coherent point of view is attached to the effect. The twist ending could be used to wave away such criticisms, but only because it resurrects the mouldiest trick in the book (can you guess what it is?). And besides, it's a bit much to subject the audience to ninety minutes of incoherent opticals and then expect them to retroactively forgive you on the basis of a last minute wave of a magic wand...

Yet even with these faults, *Vampire Blues* bears a trace of that special Franco magic, a ghost in the digital machine, seeping out between interpolated video frames. The sadness of Franco, the delirium, his oddball attitude to time and space, these aspects of his talent eke out a tenuous survival in the electronic purgatory of *Vampire Blues*, like microbes clinging to life on alien rocks. The scenes of Rachel wandering the streets of Torremolinos are curiously desolate, as is the footage of her sunbathing alone on the beach, surrounded by oblivious tourists with whom she never interacts. Certain compositions are rather beautiful, in particular Marga's magical preparations to battle Irina: Franco positions the camera very low while Romay towers over it, her magical apparatus of candles, pillars and a cut glass bowl arranged symmetrically in front of her. In the background a ceiling fan spins ominously, stirring memories of the Palmer household in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. Frequent cutaways to a curious lenticular ornament are weirdly effective too; the shifting pattern on its surface creates a pseudo-vaginal shape which Franco accompanies on the soundtrack with a variety of strange guttural moans. The device never interacts with the plot in any way but it's an agreeably freakish element that helps to counterbalance the mundane with the bizarre. Likewise Pedro Temboury's non-sequitur role as a servant-cum-victim of the Countess; he's the sort of character José Llamas would have played in the 1980s, or Ramón Ardid in the 1970s, and his comically terrible guitar-playing as he serenades his mistress is one of the few intentionally funny elements in the film. Despite a few jarring elements, Franco works his magic on the soundtrack too, by assembling a haunting montage of bird cries, wolf howls, and looped echoes, strung together with a dizzying selection of old musical cues by Daniel White.

If *Vampire Blues* had been shot on film, without post-production video fx, it could have been something special. The potential is certainly there, but you have to really *want* to like the film to cut it so much slack. For the vast majority of viewers, I suspect it will seem like just another antechamber in Jess Franco's video hell...

Cast and crew: The lead actress, billed as Rachel Sheppard, is actually Raquel Cabra, a member of the production team since

Tender Flesh and the partner of production manager (and vampire victim) Pedro Temboury. She went on to appear in *Blind Target*, *Helter Skelter*, *Las flores de la pasión* and *Flores de pervasión*.

Franco on screen: Franco plays a T-shirt vendor with a neat line in ominous pronouncements. It's a small scene, one of those 'something is sinister' moments which add incipient paranoia to a supernatural story, but Franco nails it perfectly.

Music: In addition to The Ubangis, the soundtrack includes tracks from a series of albums by Daniel J. White called *Monologue Pour...* (or 'Monologue For...'). White made four albums with this title, released between 1968 and 1976, and Franco draws freely from all of them. In fact during the credit sequence he gets so carried away that he ends up with three "Monologue" pieces running simultaneously: "Monologue Pour Siffleur", "Monologue Pour Violon" and "Monologue Pour Clarinette Basse", with "Basse Profonde" from *Mystère Bleuté* thrown in for good measure. Later we hear "Monologue Pour Harpe", "Monologue Pour Clavecin", "Monologue Pour Contre-Basse", "Monologue Pour Orgue De Barbarie" and "Monologue Pour Saxo Ténor" swelling and rolling in the mix. In addition, Franco (or his sound editor) blends together long echoes of owl hoots and wolf cries, processing the sounds until they become abstract and mysterious. Pulling together this multi-tracked spaghetti of sounds and solos into a coherent mix was quite an achievement.

Locations: Hotel Aloha Puerto in Torremolinos, and the Torremolinos seafront.

Connections: The film begins with a bogus quote from J. Sheridan Le Fanu: "*Be careful you. Lonely people are the best prey for searchers of blood.*" The comically discordant grammar is enough to trigger one's doubts, but if we check Le Fanu's lesbian vampire story, *Carmilla*, the only reference to loneliness is this, in which the heroine, Laura, speaks of her meeting with Carmilla: "*I took her hand as I spoke. I was a little shy, as lonely people are, but the situation made me eloquent, and even bold.*"¹

Timeline

Shooting date	September/October	1999
SP 'Impacto Films' DVD		2002
US 'Sub Rosa Blue' ©		2004
US 'Sub Rosa Blue' DVD	29 March	2005
SP 'Vellavisión' re-issue	July	2010

Running time

USA DVD	73m10s
SP 'Impacto' DVD	85m55s

director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Clifford Brown Jr.']. writer: **Jess Franco**. executive producer: **Kevin Collins**. producers: **Sol Clink**, **Tommy Chase**, **Casey Yip**. music: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. editor: **Guillermo A. Morales**. direct sound: **Willem Van Bergen**. 1st assistant director: **Rosa Almirall**. production manager: **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'Rolf Goulet']. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as 'A. Gutierrez']. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. casting: **Stella Maris**. electricians: **A. Ripoll**, **Mario Kafer**. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'R. Schargorodsky']. makeup: **Maria Rodona**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Bob Balabam']. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. laboratory: **U.M.T. Singen**. digital sound: **Guillermo A. Morales**. Music produced by **One Shot Productions**, scored by **Jess Franco's B-Band**. "La Nudista" composed and performed by **Daniele Luppi** (Music Marketsus, Ina Records, Italy). Special Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Francisco Bo; Hotel Tropicana, Cariheula (Málaga); Barbara Motor Wagen (Málaga); Kiko and Chus.

Cast: **Lina Romay** [as 'Lulu Laverne'] (Tina). **Christie Levin** (Gina). **Paul Lapidus** (Cyrus Kalman). **Anna Stern** (Silvia Kalman, Cyrus's wife). **Ron Franciscus** (Inspector Bernabé). **Carlos Braun** (Matias Grunebaldi/Garibaldi/Fitipaldi). **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'Ezequiel Cohen'] (Fran, a cop). **Laura Levin** (Jenny). **Guillermo Agranati** (Vargas, Kalman's manservant).

Synopsis: Tina and Gina are 'Red Silk', a pair of nightclub strippers who also operate as private detectives, specialising in cases of threats, coercion, blackmail etc. Prospective clients put their contact details in the local paper and the Red Silk girls get in touch. They also offer personal services more commonly associated with their evening job. One night, at the club where they work, they see a man called Kalman in the audience. He's a criminal with an entourage of flunkies and hangers-on attracted by his enormous wealth. His wife Silvia appears distressed, but when a man comes up to ask her if she's alright, one of Kalman's heavies scares him away. The next day a new client asks for their help in the newspaper advert. Gina calls him and tells him to be at the Flamingo Club the following evening. He is Matias Grunebaldi, and he says he wishes nothing more than to take pornographic photos of the girls together. After a photo-session that turns into a threesome, Grunebaldi hires the girls for another job. They are to transport a package across the border into

RED SILK

(US video/DVD title)

USA, 1999

Alternative titles

Seda roja (SP video/DVD)

Production companies

One Shot Productions (USA)

Casey Yip Productions (USA)

Video/DVD distributor

Sub Rosa Blue

“a foreign country” and hand it over to a man at the Tropicana Hotel. Kalman, meanwhile, spends his time discussing the Francoist regime’s mistakes with his servant Vargas. Silvia is now imprisoned in a dungeon-like room at the top of the house. When her cries irritate her husband he sends Vargas to whip her into silence. Unbeknownst to him, however, Vargas is in love with Silvia and merely fakes the whipping sounds, assuring Silvia that the time will soon come for her escape... Grunebaldi drops off the packages with Tina and Gina, and leaves them to complete their mission. Suspecting, without evidence, that Grunebaldi is going to stiff them after the packages have been delivered, the girls call a previous client, Inspector Bernabé, and ask him to join them at the rendezvous point. Then they perform their ‘Red Silk’ stage act and meet with their latest client, Fran, a handsome young man who also claims to be a police officer. He hires the girls to steal a package from one of Kalman’s cars. Next day, at the appointed time for the Grunebaldi job, the girls arrive at the Tropicana Hotel. To their astonishment, the pianist in the hotel bar is Grunebaldi himself, who greets them and declares that he is also known as Matias Garibaldi. Apparently he has different names for different jobs: ‘Grunebaldi’ is the painter/photographer, ‘Garibaldi’ is the pianist. The girls give ‘Garibaldi’ the package he wanted delivered, and then turn him over to Inspector Bernabé, who is sitting nearby, incognito. ‘Garibaldi’ recognises him and greets him like an old friend, although the cop still arrests him. After a nice relaxing sleep, the two girls meet with Fran again, who tells them to deliver a package containing a videotape to Kalman, who will pay \$200,000 for it. Fran will split the money with them fifty-fifty. The girls listen to his plan, then knock him out and head off to perform the job and keep all the money. Somehow (the script does not elaborate) they find out that the package containing the videotape is hidden in the glove compartment of one of Kalman’s cars, currently in for service at a car retailers. Taking it home to watch, they discover that the tape contains a snuff film of Kalman murdering a woman. Tina decides that this means they can blackmail Kalman for even more than the \$200,000 Fran was suggesting. They call Bernabé and tell him to be at Kalman’s house to arrest him the following day, then set off to blackmail the killer. The girls force Kalman to hand over his cheque books and credit cards, then knock him out. But before Bernabé can get his hands on the killer, Vargas frees Silvia and shoots Kalman dead. The girls drive off to enjoy their new wealth, but their car plunges over a ravine... except it’s not a real car, it’s a toy car, and the story we’ve just heard was entirely made up by Tina...

Production notes: Born in Argentina, with Swedish and Ukrainian family roots, Emilio Schargorodsky had been living in Málaga for twenty years when he first began working for Jess Franco, starting out as stills photographer on *Tender Flesh*. According to the credits, *Red Silk* was his first Franco film as director of photography, a credit which he also received on *Broken Dolls*, *Blind Target*, *Helter Skelter*, *Vampire Junction*, *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula* and *Snakewoman*. Now heavily in demand for TV commercials, Schargorodsky has a busy career as a director and cinematographer. When I spoke to him on the telephone in April 2018 he was cheerfully frank about his role in Franco’s productions: “On a Franco film, the credits are

a kind of fiction too! I was never the chief photographer. Jess was the director of photography. At first I worked as a stills photographer, on *Tender Flesh* and *Mari-Cookie*, and then I worked as a production manager too. About mid-way through those films I also began to work as an assistant cameraman. The other things I did, sometimes, were first assistant director and camera operator. If Jess was happy with your work he would put you in a more important place in the credits. If he respected you, or had some kind of good connection with you, he would give you the main credit. I did for him some photography, but it was more like suggestions – shall we put this light here, that sort of thing. But he was the chief photographer. He held the camera, he did hand-held sometimes, he did that until he couldn’t do it any more. He had Parkinson’s in later years. I think he held the camera until *Snakewoman*.”¹

Speaking to Spanish critic José Luis Salvador Estébanez in 2013, Schargorodsky explained that the working environment on a Jess Franco set could be tough for those unprepared for hard work: “We worked intensely. You do not get to work as production manager on several of Jess’s movies if you do not work perfectly. Most people do not know that Jess is a guy who demands a lot from his team: as a character he has four pairs of balls when the production of a film approaches, and more when it is rolling. It’s no fairy tale, rather it is working very close to hell. It’s his way of working and you have to be made of stern stuff to be there; I’ve seen more than one technician crying in the corner. This is Jess Franco, an explosive and charming combination.”²

Red Silk saw the arrival of another young man who would become a key member of the Franco production team over the next few years, on both sides of the camera: Exequiel Caldas. He went on to play significant roles in *Broken Dolls* and *Vampire Junction*, appeared in smaller roles in most of the others, up to and including *Flores de perversion* in 2003, and worked extensively behind the scenes too. He now lives in Uruguay. I asked him how he came to be involved in the world of Jess Franco: “I left Sweden after my unfinished music studies and arrived to Spain in August 1999 with the ambition to study audiovisual communications in the University of Málaga. I had to find somewhere to stay and my friend Damian Meny knew some people. That was how I met the Schargorodsky family. Emilio and I became very good friends. By that time he was helping Pedro Temborry with the production of *Kárate a muerte en Torremolinos* (starring another Schargorodsky, Emilio’s father Paul Lapidus). Parts of that film were shot that summer and it was in that film that I had my debut as an actor (it was a small part as a reporter). It was very much due to Pedro Temborry that Jess and Lina moved to Málaga in 1997 to shoot, in two years, *Tender Flesh*, *Marie Cookie*, *Lust for Frankenstein* and *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell*. Pedro was a big fan of Jess, and some time before he had met him at a festival, offered himself as assistant, and invited Jess to shoot in Málaga where he knew many good young people to work with. Pedro became Jess’s assistant on those films. The first thing they did was assemble the team of technicians: Ben Gordon, Raquel Cabra, Javier Caffarena and, among others, Emilio Schargorodsky as stills photographer. When I arrived, Dr. Wong was in the last stages of post-production. Pedro was starting to shoot *Kárate a muerte en Torremolinos* [a fantasy-action film released in 2003] and

Jess was already thinking of Red Silk. But then, Pedro got a job offer from a Madrid TV channel and he accepted. He explained to Jess that he couldn't continue as his assistant and that he had to move to Madrid. It took some time for Jess to forgive him for his 'desertion'. Anyway Jess blamed 'the system' that always ends up grabbing the good talents. As he used to say in Spanish: 'Te trincan.' ['They screw you.']. Pedro moved to Madrid and Jess, who needed someone serious and responsible to help him produce Red Silk, offered Emilio the job. That was how Emilio and I started to become Jess and Lina's right hand men, and my audiovisual studies had to wait for ten years because I was in the best university of the street; I was working with Jess."³

Review: *Red Silk* is a variant on the female private eye movies Franco had been making since *Labios rojos* in 1960. Compared to earlier examples of the form, such as *Sadisteronica* and *Kiss Me Monster*, it's extremely low rent, and by any reasonable standard it's seriously lacking in thrills. Viewed as a kind of elaborate home movie it has a degree of eccentric charm, but even so there are problems: the video image quality is too clinical, and the sound swings from acceptably dubbed to painfully raw, sometimes during the same scene, resulting in audio-whiplash as noise levels jump up and down from shot to shot. There's also way too much of the Red Silk girls showing off their vaginas during the course of their frankly rather tedious stage act. If you're remotely interested in what vaginas actually do, what kind of fun they get up to, or why they're being given so much screen time, you'll be left wondering to the bitter end.

However, the interaction between the heroines, a pair of cynical hookers-cum-detectives called Tina and Gina, is plausible and casually funny. Their boisterous 'sexy photo-shoot' with Matias Grunebaldi, fashion photographer and part-time art smuggler, is the comic centrepiece of the film, thanks to the exuberance of the women and a cheerfully daft performance by Carlos Braun. Franco himself dubs Braun, revelling in a parody of his own role as director: "Move it, that's it! Shake it with intelligence! [...] More tenderness! More passion! Put your finger in your ass! [...] Show the romanticism of your asshole!". For all its comic asides, however, it's a bleak world the characters inhabit. People are either vicious, selfish, or stupid, and the heroines are scarcely better than the rest. So cynical are these girls that when they discover that the villainous Kalman is killing women and filming his activities in home-made 'snuff' movies, they use the knowledge as leverage to blackmail him, after which they simply knock him out and hope that their friend, a cop, gets it together to come and arrest him! A final twist pulls the rug out from under the whole story, but while the transition from fantasy to 'reality' is wittily done (the Red Silk girls crash their car into a giant vagina!) it's essentially a twist on the old 'it was all a dream' chestnut and makes you feel like a dummy for sticking with the story to the end.

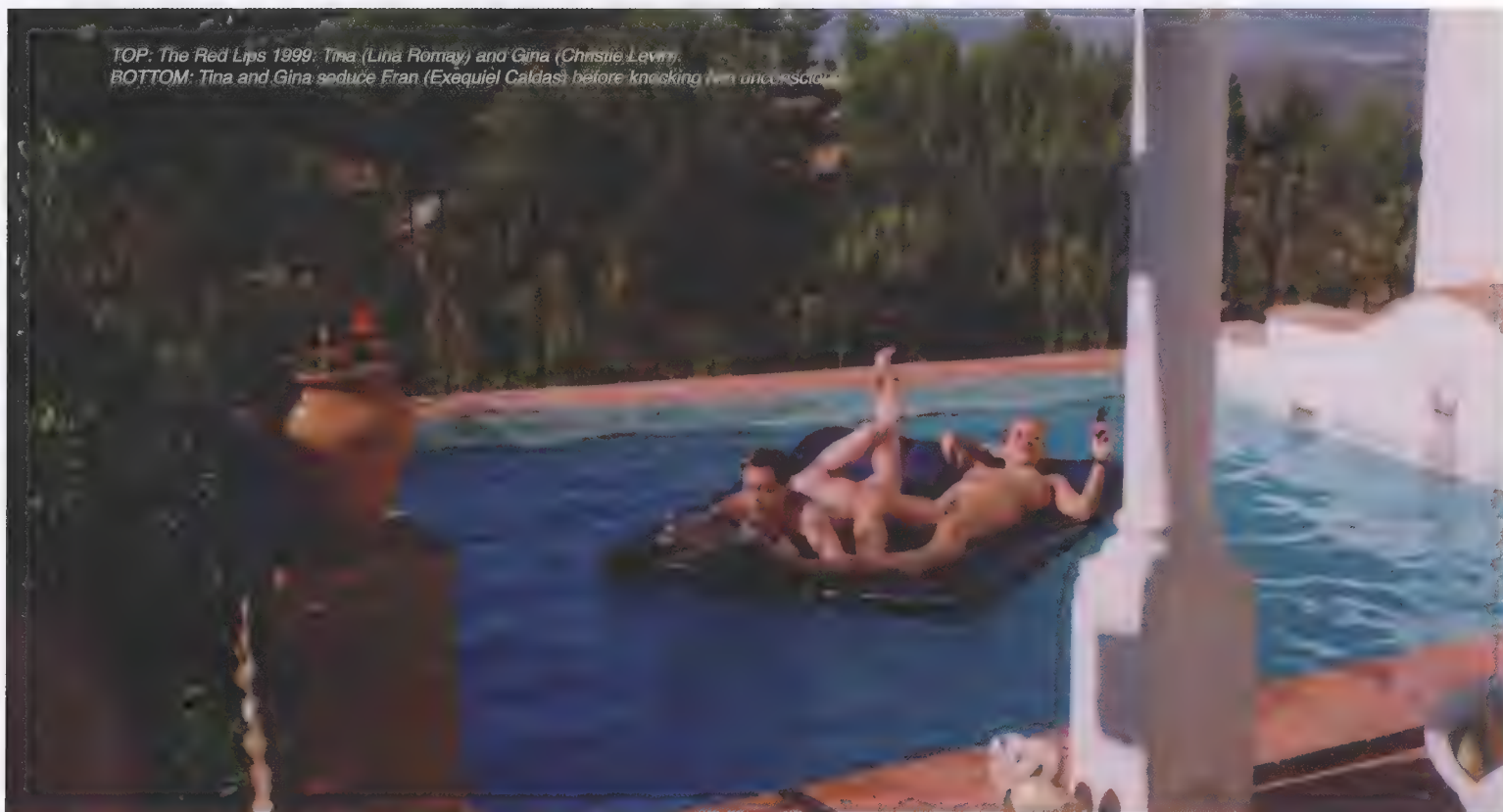
As for visual style, Franco is quite restrained this time when it comes to digital fx. Granted, Gina's dream sequence unveils the electronic mirror-image effect used extensively in *Paula-Paula*, but

the fact that she's having a nightmare offers sufficient narrative context, and besides, it's genuinely strange. Elsewhere, though, Franco is less than concerned with visual coherence. The girls call their show 'Red Silk', but their stage cavortings are relayed to us through a deep blue filter, only reverting to natural colour at the end, when at last we can see that they are indeed wearing red silk underwear. Such a blunt refusal to match style with content is almost heroically stubborn, but if it's meant as some sort of anarchic gesture it's so poker-faced that it comes across more like thoughtlessness. There's also a reprise of the motiveless 'staring into camera' which so undermined the fictive space of *Vampire Blues*. During a sex scene between Tina and Gina, actress Christie Levin looks straight down the lens several times. The women are in a hotel room together: it's a private moment, not part of their stage act. Levin's urge to look at the camera may have been just an exhibitionist reflex, but you'd have thought the director would yell 'cut'. Instead Franco actually zooms in to her face, so it's clear he decided to go along with it. But why? Gina isn't the narrator of the story, so we can't read her glance as first person omniscience. The 'twist' ending doesn't explain it either; it's still Tina's story, not Gina's. There's no justification, not without buying into some baseless claptrap about alienation techniques. There's no cine-historical or ironical reason either, no humorous or satirical context. Nor is the actress 'taking control' by looking frankly and honestly at the audience: this isn't feminism, it's just doing what girls tend to do in tacky porno videos. Such fourth wall incontinence is completely pointless. It compromises an already fragile story by shoving the audience out of the fiction and into the real world, a world in which *Red Silk* is essentially just a softcore sex video being shot in a cheap hotel room. Quite what this adds to our appreciation of the work I have no idea. Franco talked a lot about 'freedom' as the magnet for his artistic compass, and he was of course free to do whatever the hell he liked in his films, but freedom without discrimination is just a recipe for mindlessness...

Newcomer Paul Lapidus (actually the father of Emilio Schargorodsky) gives a genuinely notable performance as the evil Mr. Kalman, conveying some of the same gravitas as Ricardo Palacios in Franco's 1980s films. We can assume that Kalman is meant to be Portuguese: we see him discussing Portugal's Carnation Revolution with his servant Vargas, voicing criticism of the moderate instigators Francisco da Costa Gomes ("don't even mention his name") and Marcelo Caetano ("a son of a bitch") and expressing admiration for authoritarian hardliner António de Oliveira Salazar whose death in 1968 opened the way for democratisation ("the only honest man of the whole story"). By the time we've seen him enjoying the sounds of his wife being beaten, we've decided that he's a thoroughly bad sort, but even this doesn't prepare us for the revelation that he once appeared in a snuff film, murdering a helpless young woman tied to a bed.

If the film misses one important dramatic punch it's during the scene where Gina and Tina break into Kalman's house to blackmail him with the snuff video. Gina threatens to castrate him

TOP: The Red Lips 1999: Tina (Lina Romay) and Gina (Christie Levin).
BOTTOM: Tina and Gina seduce Fran (Exequiel Caldas) before knocking him unconscious.



if he doesn't hand over his credit cards, but Franco chooses not to let his heroine loose with a razor. And that's a pity, because judging by how angry Levin looks in the scene, she was primed to give one hell of a performance!

Cast and crew: Hats off to the slightly tubby but very spirited Carlos Braun for his turn as Grunebaldi. His unselfconscious nude horseplay with Romay and Levin is the highlight of the film and shows genuine comedic intelligence. Christie Levin is a find too: she conveys the same louche wild-girl quality that Pamela Stanford had in the seventies Franco films, and her trampy half-sneer makes her a compelling sexual presence. Acting-wise she stumbles a bit here and there, but it's nothing a few more takes wouldn't have ironed out. Lina Romay is as focussed and committed as ever, and the male contingent of *Red Silk* is enhanced by the very handsome Exequiel Caldas, whose casual manner and warm smile make him something of a rarity in Franco's later work: a male who's allowed to be attractive without being treated as a buffoon. The Red Silk girls have the hots for him, which is not to say that his character gets preferential treatment: he's whacked over the head with a gun-butt when he tries to strike a bargain with the two vixens. Like Hans Hass Jr., Fred Williams, Antonio Mayans and José Llamas before him, Caldas suggests the viability of an erotic world outside lesbianism, demonstrating a concept that was becoming increasingly rare in Franco's later work: masculine charm. As noted above, Caldas's role extended behind the camera too, in fact he regarded this as the more important part of his contribution: "I didn't consider myself an actor because I enjoyed much more the other part of the work with Jess; helping to plan the production, working with post-production, working with the selection of the music and sometimes also composing and editing. With the make-up artist maybe we were six or seven people in the entire crew in that film."⁴

Music: "La vie est une merde" reappears in its bordello jazz incarnation. Unfortunately, we also get Daniel White's uncharacteristically dreary theme music from *El hotel de los lúgus*, overlaid with some cheesy synthetic brass samples added by Franco. During the photo session with Grunebaldi, and the confrontation between the heroines and Kalman, Franco drops in "Fantômes chéris" from Daniel J. White's LP *Mystère Bleuté*.

Locations: Málaga.

Connections: *Red Silk* refers back to Franco's 'Red Lips' films, *Labios rojos* (1960), *Sadisterotica* (1967) and *Kiss Me Monster* (1967), in which two female private detectives use their brains and feminine guile to solve cases under the noses of the generally inept police. In the 1970s, Franco revamped the format with a variety of tweaks and alterations. The investigative female duo in *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* subvert the plans of criminal ne'er-do-wells, not to hand them over to the authorities but to steal their ill-gotten gains for themselves. In *Ópalo de fuego*, two dumb but sweet strippers are released from prison and used by the police as undercover agents to investigate a people-trafficking ring. The oddest variant (quite literally) is *La chica de los labios rojos* (1984), in which Lina Romay and her sidekick Karin Dior (the latter for some reason

unacknowledged in the title) investigate criminals in the style of the 1960s films, with Romay leaving the imprint of a red lipstick kiss as her calling card. *Red Silk* reworks the idea again: the sly but not especially bright Romay is paired with dumb bleached blonde Christie Levin, and their modus operandi is a mixture of the 1960s Red Lips films (the girls are private detectives) and *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (their primary aim is to get rich by creaming off money from the criminals they encounter). The similarities to *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* even extend to the character names: Tina and Gina in *Red Silk*, Tina and Pina in the earlier film ... When Gina pinches her nose to disguise her voice on the phone it's a call back to the original *Labios rojos*, as is the character name 'Kalman' ... The plight of Kalman's wife Silvia, and the performance of 'Anna Stern', recall the character played by Eva León in *Mansion of the Living Dead* (1982) ... After a long absence, *Red Silk* puts us back in the audience at a live strip show (see *Shining Sex*; *La noche de los abiertos*; *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista*, and many others). Franco cuts between shots of the cast sitting in a bar, and the act they're supposedly watching, although the latter is clearly shot against a plain curtain in a hotel room ... The subject of snuff movies makes its first appearance since *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* in 1976 ... "Some things in our story are true, others aren't. We just wanted to get you horny..." So ends the film, as we realise we've been taken for a ride by the 'Red Silk' girls, a twist that points all the way back to Franco's debut *Tenemos 18 años* (1959).

BROKEN DOLLS

(USA video/DVD title)

USA, 1999

Alternative titles

Muñecas rotas (SP video/DVD)

Production company

One Shot Productions (USA)

Video/DVD distributor

Sub Rosa Studios (US DVD)

Timeline

Shooting date	October	1999
US 'Sub Rosa Blue' ©		2004
US 'Sub Rosa Blue' DVD	30 March	2004

Running time

RUS 'Artvideo' DVD	83m15s
SP 'Impacto' DVD	89m18s

director: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Karen Wong**, **Kevin Collins**. writer: **Jess Franco**. music: **Jess Franco** and **Daniel White**. digital sound: **Guillermo A. Morales**. direct sound: **Willem van Bergen**. 'director of photography': **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. stills photographer: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'R. Schargorodsky']. first assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Almirall]. production manager: **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'Rolf Goulet']. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as 'A. Gutierrez']. electricians: **A. Ripoll**, **Mario Kafer**. casting: **Stella Maris**. makeup: **Maria Rodona**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'Bob Balabam']. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. laboratory: **U.M.T. Singen**.

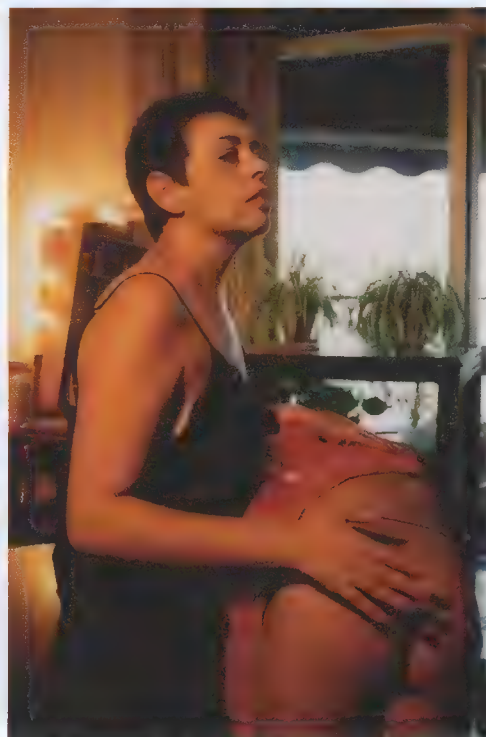
cast: **Paul Lapidus** (Don Martin). **Lina Romay** (Tona Martin, Don's wife). **Mavi Tienda** (Beatriz Martin, Don's daughter). **Christie Levin** (Gina, the daughter of a family friend). **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'Ezequiel Cohen'] (Herbie, the Martins' servant). **Guillermo Algranati** (Mario aka Peter Cosmos, a marine biologist). **Carlos Braun** (Boatman).

Synopsis: *On a small island near a major shipping lane, Don Martin and his family live in isolation from the mainland. Martin boasts that he was once a great actor of Shakespearean proportions, and takes every opportunity to drop allusions to Hamlet and Othello. He claims he amassed enough wealth to retire to this island with his wife, his lover, his daughter and a single servant. Oil drilling just off the beach creates a distant clang of heavy industry, breaking the fragile peace of the island. Martin has hidden treasure somewhere on the island, but when Herbie finds it and shows Beatriz, neither can think of what to do with it. They also find evidence that Don Martin was not a great actor but merely a lowly variety player who specialised in 'greatest hits' packages of Shakespearian soliloquies, mixed with passages from Hitler's speeches. One day Mario, an old friend of Gina's, arrives on the island, seeking permission to marry Gina. Don Martin refuses, and threatens to kill him, but when Mario claims to be a friend of the great composer Peter Croiler, Martin welcomes him into his home, consenting to the wedding with Gina and offering his bedroom for their lovemaking. However, once they are in bed together he dresses up in a Napoleonic costume and stabs them both with a sword, before walking into the sea and drowning, while reciting scraps of old stage performances. Beatriz and Herbie strike up a friendship of sorts, and Tona decides to stay on the island, having no enthusiasm for life anywhere else.*

Production notes: *Broken Dolls* was made back-to-back with *Red Silk*, with the same cast and crew, and was shot in just a week. It was based on a story idea by Jean-Claude Carrière which had also provided the basis for 1982's *La casa de las mujeres perdidas*, although in both cases Carrière went uncredited. Once again the production was shot on video rather than film. I asked crew-member and co-star Exequiel Caldas what he and his friends in the production felt about the medium Franco had chosen to use:

*"For us it was maybe a bit disappointing, and we talked about it a couple of times. I must say that Emilio and I were always trying to understand the old man because we saw him as a complex rebel in the world of cinema. We spent many, many hours with him in his apartment or in the cafeteria of the hotel in Torremolinos, and the stories he told us from his entire life dedicated to cinema were many. We have to understand that he was already shooting before we were even born. He lived through all the changes that the industry had experienced and when digital video came he used it in a natural way, very glad that it was cheaper and that the quality was very good. Different, but very good. So he didn't feel disappointed at all. He was glad. He told us when we asked him about it: 'You'll see. In a few years everybody will be shooting in digital video'."*¹ Schargorodsky agrees: *"He was the first one to get it. Before everybody. And he said it with a very clear mind, telling us, 'this is much better than film because you don't have to wait – you can see what you are recording, the image is bright.' He had a very modern view. But for me, I didn't want to shoot in video. I didn't like it, it was too bright. For me it wasn't film, I loved the look of film. So for us, the crew, it was 'Oh no, we're going to shoot in video! We don't like that.' Because we had in our minds a kind of nostalgia for film. For me, I tried to make it less bright, and to add more 'noise'. But for him, it was perfect, or it didn't matter. I think for Jess it was like 'This is a new thing, and we have to work with it because it's cheaper and easier, and it's the future.'"*²

Review: This melancholy meditation on wasted lives is a reworking of *La casa de las mujeres perdidas*, which Franco originally made in 1982, based on an unfilmed story idea from the 1960s by Franco and esteemed French screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière. In the context of the surrounding One Shot Productions it's a significant change of pace. Franco jettisons the flip comedy of *Mari-Cookie* and *the Killer Tarantula* and *Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell*, downplays the porno exhibitionism of *Red Silk* and *Lust for Frankenstein*, and concentrates on character and mood. On the soundtrack we hear the swirling of waves on the beach, wind in the trees, birds tweeting, and – oddly but effectively – the sound of men working on a distant engineering site, which is contextualised by repeated shots of enormous oil tankers cruising past on the sea. In terms of the tone towards which Franco is reaching, we're in the mournful realm of earlier films like *Bahía blanca* and *Juego sucio en Casablanca*. The emphasis of the story is on disappointment, sorrow, resentment, impotence and lies. Sexual interludes occur, but they communicate more than just the favourite erotic scenarios of the director. A spanking scene for instance, in which Tona punishes her daughter Beatriz, is not filmed lasciviously; instead it's an illustration of the way parents use shame to break the will of a child. It's not punishment that matters, it's the rewiring of the child's thought processes. The spanking only stops when the girl agrees with the mother that she is bad. Meanwhile Gina's sexuality comes from boredom, like the parallel character of Desdemona in *La casa de las mujeres perdidas*. And the father's only sexual habit is spying through binoculars, which seems as much to do with his fantasy view of himself as some kind of sea captain as it does with scopophilia.



TOP: Don Martin (Paul Lapidus) spies on his daughter Beatriz. BOTTOM LEFT: Dressed up in theatrical garb, Don Martin prepares to slaughter Mario (Guillermo Algranati). BOTTOM RIGHT: Tona spansks her daughter Beatriz (Mavi Tienda).

It's ironic that while Franco frequently described women as superior, regarding men as essentially fools or brutes, when it came to creating three-dimensional characters he fared best with males. His portraits of failed, weak or deluded men are far more psychologically vivid than his portraits of women, where a degree of flatness and detachment is evident. That's not to say that Don Martin in *Broken Dolls* is a deeply layered character of Shakespearean dimensions. It's just that when you decide that men amount to nothing but failure and foolishness, with women the triumphal repositories of your sexual preferences, there's a tendency to skimp the psychology of the latter while gifting complexity to the former. Franco may have wanted to do away with men in his work, and he almost succeeded in the years between *Broken Dolls* and *Paula-Paula* (2009), but that very urge may have resulted in a kick-back when it came to writing these despised individuals. "So my father was a very small actor. A poor man. A clown," says Beatriz, when Herbie the family servant shows her the mostly pathetic contents of her father's hidden treasure chest. "There's nothing wrong with that. It's very nice to be a clown," says Herbie, played by Red Silk's Exequiel Caldas. While the servant may be offering these words to comfort Beatriz, one suspects that Franco invests something more in them. After all, he played quite a few clowns and buffoons himself in his cameo appearances over the years.

Interestingly, *Broken Dolls* soft-pedals the incestuous sexual overtones of *La casa de las mujeres perdidas*. The mother may spank her daughter on her exposed bottom, but she doesn't sexually molest her; the father shows no sexual interest in his daughter except for the aforementioned scene when he spies on her walking nude along the beach (even then he doesn't appear to be aroused); and there's no sibling lust as there was in the earlier film. It would be interesting to know if this stems from a more faithful adherence to Jean-Claude Carrière's original story idea, or if it was intended by Franco to give One Shot Productions a less controversial subject for marketing in the United States. For me, the chief downside of *Broken Dolls* (apart from the ever-present problem of video) is the overall lack of perversity. By removing the incestuous aspect, Franco deprives the film of that unhealthy vibe which made *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* so compellingly sick and twisted. And while it's a relief to find him concentrating on character, the lack of actual incident in the film is a bar to wider appreciation. When Martin murders Mario and Gina, we should be horrified: instead, I suspect we're all quietly relieved that someone has actually done something, in a film that sees most of the characters simply wandering around feeling sorry for themselves.

Broken Dolls spends a great deal of time building up a palpable sense of place. The island, which has palm trees and a shingle beach, looks run-down and shabby. Abandoned beach dwellings and half-finished constructions rot at the shoreline, as though this once pleasant region has been deserted by its occupants, leaving only the dysfunctional Martin clan clinging on in the vain hope of riches. The ambience is one of a holiday hideaway gone to seed, with the hulking shapes of oil tankers turning even the majesty

of the sea into something ugly and oppressive. A recurring shot of a doll washed up on the shoreline suggests the dreams of childhood smashed upon the shores of adulthood. We frequently see characters alone against the stone shingles of the beach: Tona, shouting her impotent rage at the heedless industrial behemoths crossing the horizon, Beatriz roaming the shoreline nude, an androgynous beauty with no lover to appreciate her. Before the film ends she will discover that even her tenuous sense of family is falling apart, when Tona casually admits that she is not the girl's mother. Gina spends an age primping and fondling herself in the hope of arousing Herbie, who imperviously plays his guitar before finally telling her, "I never get horny with a girl of your kind." Loneliest of all is the father, Don Martin (does 'Don' indicate his name, or his assumed patriarchal status? It's never made clear...) He is lost in delusional grandeur, prisoner of a fake past, which precludes any kind of connection to another human being. Like someone with Alzheimer's Disease, he's trapped in a loop of obsessional memory, and because he can show no interest in others he is totally alone. His wife, however, gets the worst deal, and her speech at the end sums up the quiet horror of the film: lives without love, lost souls who fall short of their goals and settle for the consolations of mediocrity: "He was a mad man, an egoist, stupid and exhibitionist, a complete fake as a human being, but he wasn't a bad guy. I never loved him, but he was my man anyway, the only one I ever had, the only one who told me poetical words, or sang stupid romantic songs to me. Now I know I'll never leave this hateful island. I'm anchored here, like Herbie, like Beatriz, like the dolls lost between the rocks, locked in our silence, waiting for nothing in the middle of nowhere." All things considered, *Broken Dolls* is among the two or three best Franco films of the video era. Whilst it is of course shot on videotape, giving it the appearance (and sometimes, it has to be said, the emotional tenor) of a daytime Brazilian soap opera, it's a haunting, emotionally adult work – an artistic success against extremely difficult odds.

Cast and crew: Mavi Tienda is the strongest female cast member, giving an earnestly sombre performance as the troubled daughter. She was a friend of Pedro Temboury's (having starred in his short film *Psycho-lettes*) who made her debut for Franco in *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula* and went on to appear in *Helter Skelter* (2000) and *Blind Target* (2000), plus Temboury's *Ellos robaron la picha de Hitler* (2006), before apparently withdrawing from the acting profession ... Exequiel Caldas once again stands out, as the family servant whose simplicity of spirit is not quite as crippling as his boss assumes. When we discussed the film, Caldas agreed with me that it was special, and made this interesting observation: "Broken Dolls is my favorite film from that period. One of the things that impressed me a lot was the way that Jess changed from one day to another. As soon as we started to film *Broken Dolls* he became much more serious. The entire ambience on the set changed. Suddenly, Jess didn't make many jokes, and the empty spaces were kind of tense. I noticed that Jess did this on purpose to transmit that ambience to us all and from there to the film. I felt more relaxed, though in this film, since I felt that Jess was building confidence in me after Red Silk. I know that

Jess was very pleased with this film and he once said that it was one of his favourites ever.”³

Music: Opening with Daniel White’s “Monologue Pour Clairon Funèbre” from *Monologue Pour...* (1973), the film also takes in two more tracks from that album, “Monologue Pour Guitare Brésilienne” and “Monologue Pour Guitare Classique”, plus “Pluie Sur Bergen” from White’s *Mystère Bleuté* LP.

Locations: Málaga.

Connections: As noted already, this is a remount of the 1982 Franco film *La casa de las mujeres perdidas*. In addition, the island setting with its trapped, doomed or fatalistic characters recalls *Bahía blanca* (1984).

Other versions: Two versions exist, one Spanish, the other American. The editing differs only in relation to the scene in which Beatriz watches her father and Gina having sex. The American version shortens the scene by six minutes.

BLIND TARGET

(USA video/DVD title)

USA, 2000

© One Shot Productions, 2000

Alternative titles

Objetivo a ciegas (SP video/DVD)

Production company

One Shot Productions (USA)

Theatrical distributor

Sub Rosa Studios (USA)

Timeline

Shooting date	28 Jan-08 February	2000
SP ‘Impacto Films’ VHS		2002
US ‘Sub Rosa’ DVD		2005

Running time

US ‘Sub Rosa’ DVD	86m20s
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director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Jess Franco** [as ‘David Khunne Jr.’]. adaptation: **Kevin Collins, J. Douglas Foxworth**. script: **Kevin Collins**. producers: **Kevin Collins, Peter J. Evanko, Karen Wong**. music: **Jess Franco, Daniel J. White**. latin music: **Galo Espinoza**. songs: “Dead Eyes”, music by Brian Horrorwitz, Randy Ramos, words Kevin Collins, performed by Ubangis; “Flor de la higuera”, “Miel de amor”, “Gracias por tu amor”, “Caminar de amor”, “Claridad”, “Vamos hermano”, music and lyrics by

Galo Espinoza, produced and performed by Cristal Andino; “My Old Friend the Bottle” written and performed by Johnny Carson. director of photography: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. editor: **Guillermo A. Morales**. sound editor: **Karl Pinto**. sound assistant: **John Wood**. 1st assistant director: **Rosa Almirall**. 2nd assistant director: **Exequiel Caldas** [as ‘Ezequiel Cohen’]. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as ‘Bob Balabam’]. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as ‘A. Gutierrez’]. electricians: **A. Ripoll, Mario Kafer**. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. make-up: **Maria Rodona**. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as ‘R. Schargorodsky’]. production manager: **Exequiel Caldas** [as ‘Rolf Goulet’]. casting: **Stella Maris**. laboratories: **U.M.T. Singen**. digital mastering: **Curro Perea** [as ‘Kurro Maiden’]. The producers wish to thank **Florence Oakley, Michael Coughlan, Teresa Coughlan, Neil C. Kalbacher, Monica Li, Larry Liang, Darrin Person, Carl Merson, Steven Johnson** (in USA) and Hotel Melia, Costa del Sol; Hotel Sol Principe, Hotel Sol Principito, Palacio congresos Torremolinos, Baños del Carmen, Contimotor, La Nogalera Urbanización, Señorío de Lepanto (in Málaga, Spain). *Additional credits from the “Trash Palace” website:* production assistant: **Juan Carlos**. direct sound: **Willem Van**. technical services: **Quattro Vision**. casting: **Sol Klink**. Ms. Quigley’s Wardrobe provided by **Karen Wong**. television sequences produced by **One Shot Productions**, USA. transportation provided by: **Dee Snyder**. line producers: **Florence Oakley, Michael Coughlan, Monica Li, Darrin Person**. associate producers: **Neil C. Kalbacher, Teresa Coughlan**. Produced in Spain for **One Shot Productions** by **Quattro Vision**. *Uncredited:* martial arts choreography: **Oliver Denis**. sound recording engineer: **Guillermo A. Morales**. grip: **Guillermo A. Morales**. English dialogue coach: **Exequiel Caldas**. blood-wrangler: **Lina Romay**.

Cast: **Raquel Cabra** [as ‘Rachel Sheppard’] (Maria). **Oliver Denis** [as ‘Oliver Dennis’] (Greg). **Tatiana Cohen** (Beatriz). **Lina Romay** (Tora). **Roger Pavlovich** (Leonardo Radeck). **Linnea Quigley** (Serena). **Johnny Carson** (Junco). **Brian D. Horrorwitz** (Body Guard #1). **Paul Lapidus** (Howard). **Mavi Tienda** (Melissa Byrd). **Robert King** (Duarte). **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as ‘Joaquin Phre’] (Body Guard #2). **Exequiel Caldas** [as ‘Exequiel Cohen’] (Tora’s Thug #1). **Emilio Schargorodsky** (Tora’s Thug #2). **Peter Evanko** (Luis). “With” **Hazzen Lennon** (Maria’s aunt). **Steve Barrymore** (Howard Vernon). **Genevieve Geneslay** (house cleaner). *Uncredited:* **Peter J. Evanko** (barman wearing spectacles).

Synopsis: *Born in the dirt-poor but beautiful Latin American country of San Hermoso, talented writer Maria Beltran emigrated to the United States to find success. When her latest book – “Desperate Letters” which exposes the dictatorial excesses of San Hermoso’s government with thinly veiled fictional excesses – begins to ride the best seller charts, she*

is sent by her publishing house back to San Hermoso for an ill-advised publicity tour. A strange and dangerous array of old friends, politicians, terrorists and torturers are waiting for Maria in every shady corner of the superficially idyllic locale. Will she be safer on her own, in the hands of political extremists or even under the watchful eye of the CIA? With a blind eye towards the true path to safety, Maria can't be sure if she is the target of the cruelties to come.

Production notes: *Red Silk* and *Broken Dolls* were shot in September and October 1999, with *Helter Skelter* slotted in soon after. Just three months later, in January 2000, Franco's production wagon was rolling again, with a politically-themed thriller called *Blind Target*. Easily the most elaborate, ambitious, and formally disciplined film Jess made for One Shot, it even had a second unit shooting in the USA, picking up all the material seen on TV sets throughout the film, including Linnea Quigley being interviewed on the American TV news. Exequiel Caldas recalls, "It was great fun to shoot *Blind Target*. We were a bigger crew, producer Kevin Collins came over from the US for the shooting. I think the original idea of the film was from Kevin, and then Jess worked on that script, but it wasn't his story. There was a little bit more money than the other productions, although I believe the budget was lower than *Killer Barbys vs Dracula*. We talked to Jess about Oliver Denis who did the choreography in *Kárate a muerte en Torremolinos* and he liked the idea. Afterwards he was very pleased with the result of those scenes. As in the other films, Emilio and I were in charge of the entire production so it was quite a lot of work, but we had a lot of fun. To shoot up in the Montes de Málaga was pleasant. Very nice locations. There were tense moments as well. I remember in the Hotel Meliá shooting in the suite with Tatiana Cohen and Rachel Sheppard. Tatiana was very nervous and she wasn't able to say her lines in understandable English. Kevin hid himself in the closet, Jess and Lina were very angry. I didn't know what to do because it was my job to help Tatiana with the English lines but she was too nervous, so Jess only had one choice. He suspended the shooting until next day. The next day everything went alright."¹

Speaking in 2003, Collins himself downplayed his role in the initial creation of the film: "My experience as a writer in *Blind Target* is minimal and a bit exaggerated. Jess invented the story and commissioned us to prepare the script. My fellow scriptwriter did a little treatment and then we added brief elements. Most of my contributions were in the dialogue area, trying to give the tone of authentic conversations to the characters, which sometimes is difficult because it is not easy to sound authentic when a character does fantastic things. The only real and tangible contribution I made to the story was the creation of Melissa Byrd's character, but the role was shortened in consideration of the time we made the movie. So all the compliments should go to Jess, since he was the one who created the ideas and watched all the time until they were put on the movie."²

Emilio Schargorodsky was among those now very happily ensconced in the productions: "Jess is the only person I know who raises our salaries, movie after movie, without us having to demand it. This was compensated with a hard fight on every receipt that was spent

on production. All expenses must be well justified and supervised... or you had to pay it out of your pocket. This path is hard, but it is certainly the best way to learn."³

Brian Horrorwitz's documentary *Antena Criminal* is a fascinating look at the production of *Blind Target*. The basic crew came down to Franco as director, camera operator and director of photography, plus Emilio Schargorodsky (camera and lighting assistant), Guillermo Morales (sound recordist), Exequiel Caldas (production manager and assistant director), Joaquín Sánchez Miranda (practical effects), Mario Kafer and A. Ripoll (electricians and occasional camera assistants). The roles are clearly fluid, adapting to any eventuality. See for instance how Guillermo Morales, the sound engineer, casually takes on the role of 'grip', pushing Jess's wheelchair 'dolly' as he shoots a scene in the tiled lobby of the Hotel Meliá. Electricians Mario Kafer and A. Ripoll take turns waving foliage to create shadows for a simulated travelling car shot, or hold up light reflectors; Exequiel Caldas coaches the actresses who have difficulty speaking English; and Lina Romay squirts Linnea Quigley in the face with fake blood for her death scene. Everyone mucks in.

Franco spoke revealingly about the film during *Antena Criminal*. Referring to the lower than usual level of sex in the film, he said: "I don't think to show the eroticism of those sequences is essential for the story that I am trying to explain. I think I was very very... kind of a 'journalist', explaining something without getting too involved in it. I made an effort because, in general in all of my films, the camera and myself, we get involved with the persons there. And in this case I tried to treat it, you know, like a news journalist or a TV network, or something like that. To be kind of 'colder' [...] I think in this case, I got what I wanted which was to give a terrible impression of someone who's completely alone and in the hands of the enemy there's nothing she can do but to do what they ask you to do. And it's the heart, the motor, of this film."⁴

The excruciating 'highlight' of *Antena Criminal* is the incident referred to by Exequiel Caldas, in which actress Tatiana Cohen struggles for what feels like an eternity with the line "Can't you see I've stayed in good shape?" Franco shows enormous patience, leaving the actress alone to rehearse and rehearse, and yet the simple phrase keeps coming out hopelessly mangled. At one point, Franco and Caldas (the latter working as dialogue coach) struggle to get the actress to pronounce the single word 'shape', only for the letter 'p' to go missing in take after take! It's funny, but also very painful. Cohen is clearly out of her depth ("That scene was her first ever, and she was very nervous acting naked," Caldas told me), and you do feel for her as she tries to learn her lines phonetically in an alien tongue. You also feel for Franco, as the task of getting a half-way usable performance turns into a Zeno's Arrow nightmare, where the more effort is expended, the more fractional the problem becomes: from a fluffed line to a fluffed word to a fluffed letter! What's clear from watching him closely is that it was far from amusing at the time. He looks quite exhausted, dispirited even. As he sits smoking and staring into

Leonardo Radeck (Roger Pavlovich) and the sadistic Tona (Lina Romay) enjoy interrogating Maria (Raquel Cabra) in *Blind Target*.



space, listening to the actress making a hash of her rehearsal in the adjacent room, you suspect that his thoughts are drifting back to his days with Howard Vernon, Maria Schell, Christopher Lee, Herbert Lom, Mercedes McCambridge, George Sanders, Klaus Kinski. It's worth cringing through the whole sequence, though, to see Lina Romay cradling Franco's head against her stomach in sympathy.

Of course the big question lurking in the viewer's mind is 'Why didn't he just dub the actress later?' This, after all, was the way things were done in the 1960s and 1970s, when international casts would speak the lines in their own language, safe in the knowledge that the dialogue would be added later. Although dubbing definitely took place on the One Shot Films, it sits alongside a curious insistence on live sound recorded in English. It leads inevitably to problems, as inexperienced actors wrestle with an unfamiliar language while trying to give a believable performance.

Review: *Blind Target* is the odd one out among Franco's video productions. It's a political thriller with some Bond-style espionage trappings, although in this case without irony or quotational playfulness. The scope is ambitious, taking in political assassination, international intrigue, hostile media scrutiny, and the difficulty of being accepted by your homeland after finding success abroad. It also incorporates torture, blackmail and sapphic sex, although the latter is concentrated into just a single encounter which thankfully does not outstay its welcome. There's an increased briskness and real-world texture to the project, perhaps because, as Franco said in the interview quoted above, "I tried to treat it like a news journalist [...] To be kind of 'colder'". The stark clarity of the photography sees Franco dispensing with video post-production fx, and concentrating on a realistic mise-en-scène, lit with a clarity that works with the clinical quality of video, rather than ignoring it or swamping it in digital fx in an attempt to 'break the curse'. If, as I've suggested, shooting on video failed for inherently technical reasons to achieve the dreamlike aura for which Franco generally aimed, then *Blind Target* sees him advancing a different structuring principle, journalistic reportage, for which detachment or 'coldness' is very appropriate.

This however was not what most Franco commentators were looking for at the time of *Blind Target's* release. The project was poorly received, mainly because it lacked the by-now anticipated lashings of sex and violence. For anyone who grows weary of slow motion lesbian sex, however, it's refreshing and quite exciting to find Franco returning to the craft of storytelling again. Like *Broken Dolls*, this is a film that owes more to the cinema than it does to the world of streaming video porn, and that's no bad thing considering the overall spread of Franco's career. *Blind Target* has a script, a story, a narrative that connects to the real world, and it doesn't ask you to spend literally half an hour watching people waving their crotches at a video camera. But while the sex and

violence play second fiddle to the story here, they do emerge from time to time. The heroine makes love with her female best friend, only for a secret camera recording to be used to discredit her with the American authorities and the media. As for violence, when Rachel is interrogated by the villainous Tora, Lina Romay really sinks her teeth into the role of a sick torturer, a woman who enjoys her work just as Howard Vernon's Dr. Milton Costa did in *Women in Cellblock 9* (1977).

If there's one aspect of *Blind Target* that sticks in the throat somewhat, it's the depiction of the female lead as a helpless little lady who has to be saved by her hunk o' man ex-husband. Given that we learn, at the start of the film, that the couple have recently split up, and Maria is established in the script as someone who values her independence, it's a bit much when the husband pops up in the 'final reel' to act as his wife's saviour. Bearing in mind how persistently Franco favours 'girls on top', and how frequently he depicts men as either hapless schmucks or raging monsters, I suppose we should let this one pass, but I can't help feeling it would have been preferable for Maria to have fallen for a new 'action man' rather than being steered back to the one she was ready to divorce.

Music: In an interview published at the Trash Palace website, Brian Horowitz of The Ubangis was ambivalent about the merits of the band's title theme "Dead Eyes": "*The big mistake was allowing a third party connected with the production try to write lyrics. It ruined the formula.*"⁵ In the opening scenes of Maria walking home through what looks like a deserted college campus, Franco drops Daniel J. White's "Monologue Pour Saxo Ténor" on top of a looping instrumental phrase from the Ubangis song, and the two musical pieces fit together perfectly – not just in the same key but in the phrasing and harmonic changes too, showing Franco's musical ear and his sensitivity to melodic counterpoint.

Locations: The Hotel Melía in Málaga; The 'Restaurante Los Montes' on the outskirts of Málaga; Apartamentos Bajondillos, Málaga; a shopping centre in Torremolinos.

Connections: Overtly political themes are rare in Franco's films. *Rififi en la ciudad* (1964) deals with corruption in political life, with an ex drug-smuggler aiming for high office in an unspecified Latin-American state; the Women-in-Prison films aim a few barbs at repressive dictators without making the attacks too specific, although you don't have to look too far for a likely target; *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1976) exposes the corrupt power of the unrestrained Catholic Church; double standards and hubris in American foreign policy are attacked in *Dark Mission* (1987) and *Esmeralda Bay* (1988); and the evils of fascism provide a 'colourful backdrop' for a tale of love during wartime in *Fall of the Eagles* (1989). Of the more recent films, only *Red Silk* touches on politics, with the villainous Cyrus Kalman waxing nostalgic for the pre-revolutionary military government of Portugal ... Lina Romay threatens to torture Rachel with a pair of heated hair tongs applied to her vagina, as she did to another poor unfortunate in 1981's *La noche de los sexos abiertos*.

HELTER SKELTER

(USA video/DVD title)

USA, 2000

Alternative titles

Helter Skelter Part One “Pleasure and Pain”

Production companies

One Shot Productions (USA)

Casey Yip Productions (USA)

Theatrical distributor

Sub Rosa Studios (USA)

Timeline

Shooting date	2000
US ‘Sub Rosa Blue’ copyright date	2004
US ‘Sub Rosa Blue’ DVD	30 March 2004

DVD running time

US ‘Sub Rosa’ DVD	83m13s
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director: **Jess Franco** [as ‘Clifford Brown Jr.’]. writer: **Jess Franco**, based on the novels of the **Marquis De Sade**. executive producer: **Kevin Collins**. producers: **Tommy Chase**, **Sol Clink**, **Kevin Collins**, **Casey Yip**. associate producer: **Peter Evanko**. direct sound: **Willem Van Bergen**. director of photography: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. music: **Jess Franco**, **Alain Petit**, **Daniel J. White**. “Hard Echoes”, “Blues pour Nino”, “Floating High” and “Delire qu’on crée” written and performed by **Alain Petit**. editor: **Curro Perea** [as ‘Kurro Maiden’]. first assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Almirall]. production managers: **Bill Mendoza**, **Emilio Schargorodsky**. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as ‘Al Gutierrez’]. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. electricians: **Mario Kafer** [as ‘Mario Kaffer’], **Aitor Renduelez** [as ‘Renduelez’]. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as ‘R. Schargorodsky’]. make-up: **Maria Rodona**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as ‘J. Phre’]. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. laboratories: **U.M.T. Singel**. digital sound editor: **Guillermo A. Morales**. *Additional credits from the One Shot website*: post-production facilities (USA): **Sun Stone Video**. drawings: **Alfonso Azpiri**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Madame Champville). **Mavi Tienda** [as ‘Cassandra Lee’] (Madame Champville’s bisexual lover). **Exequiel Caldas** [as ‘Exequiel Cohen’] (the male lover). **Analía Ivars** (brunette in slow motion cutaways). **Raquel Cabra** [as ‘Rachel Sheppard’] (blonde in slow motion cutaways).

Synopsis: *Reclining on the sofa at her Paris home, a lesbian dominatrix and brothel madame – who may or may not be the Marquis De Sade’s*

Madame Champville – muses over recent events, in particular her acquisition of a young punkette whom she has seduced into sapphic servitude. Flashbacks to her sexual encounters with the punkette are intercut with memories of two whores who enacted a variety of softcore sadomasochistic charades for the delectation of their madame. One day, Champville found her punkette girlfriend in the arms of a man. So incensed was she by this betrayal that she tortured the man while the girl watched in horror. Still furious, Champville stabbed her lover to death, then killed the man. As the film ends we see Madame Champville swatting her own vagina with a leather whip...

Review: *Helter Skelter* is a patchwork of insipid lesbian sex scenes and torpid flagellation, dragged out to feature length with leftovers from earlier projects such as *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell* and *Vampire Blues* and sprinkled with a pretentious voice-over quoting extensively from the Marquis De Sade. As empty and tiresome as anything in Franco’s whole career, it has nothing to offer the attentive viewer, and along with *La cripta de las condenadas* (2009) marks the nadir of Franco’s later output.

The film takes its title from a Beatles track, but nothing in the subject of the film chimes either with the lyrics or the savagery of that song. Hippie cult leader and psychopath Charles Manson used the words ‘Helter Skelter’ in relation to his vision of an imminent race war, and one of his acid-frazzled followers daubed the phrase in a victim’s blood at a murder site. None of this strikes a meaningful spark with the Franco film either. Instead, *Helter Skelter* is a smorgasbord of irrelevances: references to books, paintings and comic-strip art float around in the film without coalescing into anything persuasive or intelligent. Franco had always been fond of random juxtapositions; as far back as *Necronomicon* (1967) he’d been slapping together unrelated elements using the syntax of editing to tease the viewer into leaps of association. At least *Necronomicon* was self-consciously a parody of the 1960s art movie, and what Franco regarded as its mannered grasping for significance. Here the project itself is so bereft of significance that the gambit of throwing together random art references has no context, and no visual beauty or satirical wit to fall back on either.

The onscreen title of the film is *Helter Skelter Part One “Pleasure and Pain”*, so it would seem that the numerous quotations from the Marquis De Sade are meant to form the backbone of the film. Yet they are so incoherent, so contradictory, and so mismatched to the image, that I wonder whether it was really Franco who added them. Did he supervise the voice-over himself, and select the quotations, or were they stuck on in post-production by the producers? Note that the credits mention an American post-production facility, Sun Stone Video in New Jersey. The English-language voice-over is delivered by an actress so impervious to nuance that you’d swear she’d opened the book for the first time just seconds before the mike was switched on. Numerous fluffs and errors of phrasing indicate that this unrehearsed voice artist is having great difficulty tracking Sade’s convoluted sentence structure. Still, who cares, eh? It’s only a Jess Franco movie.

The quotes come from four texts by Sade: *La Nouvelle Justine*, "Florville and Courval", *The 120 Days of Sodom*, and a letter from Sade to his wife dated September 1783. As dumb luck would have it, all of this material turns up in the 1966 Grove Press edition of *The 120 Days of Sodom*: the short story "Florville and Courval" was included in its entirety, the quotes from *La Nouvelle Justine* can be found in the prefatory essays by Pierre Klossowski ("Nature as Destructive Principle") and Simone de Beauvoir ("Must We Burn Sade?"), and the letter to Sade's wife is also quoted by De Beauvoir. If you were of a suspicious nature you might wonder if this means that the Sadean 'themes' of *Helter Skelter* arose purely from the act of thumbing through the Grove Press volume looking for random stuff to blurt over the images...

The film begins with a quote from *La Nouvelle Justine*: "Yes, my friend, yes, I abhor Nature. I detest her because I know her well. Aware of her frightful secrets, I have fallen back on my self and I have felt... I have experienced a kind of pleasure in copying her foul deeds." ¹ These words (spoken by the libertine character Almani in the book) embody a fascinating contradiction. In many instances Sade sang the praises of acting in accordance with one's nature, with cruelty a natural law. Here, though, he has a libertine character who hates nature, despises it, yet dedicates his life to the reproduction of its grossest excesses. Is this not a maddening conundrum, one of the many warring contradictions and fevered incoherences which pepper Sade's work? You would think that a lifelong reader of Sade might use a quote like this as a path towards visualising his notions of nature and evil. So does Franco respond creatively? Does the quote find so much as a kindred image? Not on your life. It's delivered over a shot of Analía Ivars doing a sexy dance. The raging fever of the Sadean mind, reduced to a shimmy in a see-through frock. Such is the 'dialectic' of *Helter Skelter*: Franco simply drizzles the text willy-nilly over the surface of the film, like a careless drunk relieving himself on a lavatory floor.

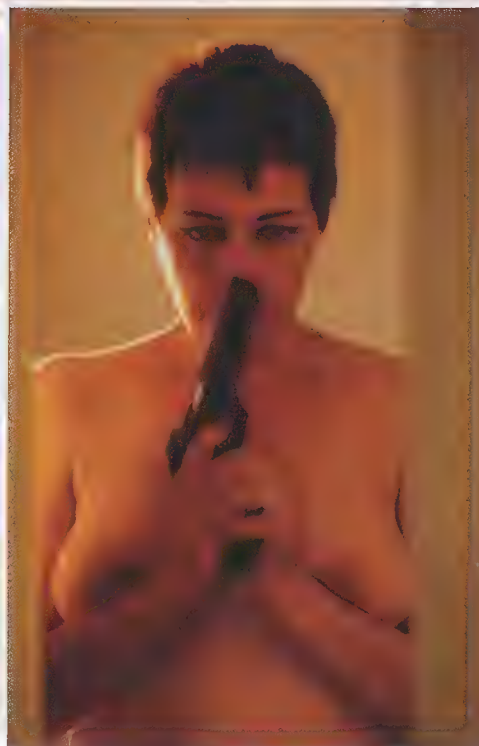
Too cruel? I suppose the material from *The 120 Days of Sodom* does have some connection to the character played by Lina Romay, inasmuch as it describes a character called Madame Champville, "a woman of about fifty, slender, well made, having the most voluptuous quality in her look and bearing; a faithful devotee of Sappho, she had that kind of expression even in her slightest movements, in her simplest gestures, in her least words." ² Franco goes on to use a sizeable chunk of Sade's description of this woman, one of the storytellers who entertain the four libertines during the debauchery which takes up the majority of *The 120 Days*. In fact he removes just a single line, mentioning her blonde hair. I think it's fair to assume that Romay is meant to be playing a modern Madame Champville, or else why remove a line just because it contradicts her physical appearance? (On the other hand, we do get a reference to Champville's flabby withered ass, a far from accurate description of Romay's well preserved rear end...)

From "Florville and Courval" we get three quotes, two of which are worth repeating here: "Deep in my heart, a secret voice cries out, saying that for me all this happiness is but a shadow, which

will vanish like the flower which blooms and withers in the space of a single day. Therefore, do not accuse me of being capricious, nor say that I am growing cold or indifferent, Monsieur." And the second: "My own guilt is an excess of sensibility, an unfortunate tendency to see things in the most sinister light possible, the cruel result of my reverses of fortune." ³ Needless to say, none of this strikes any meaningful echo in the film. Sade's short story is a cat's cradle of devious and unlikely narrative twists designed to get the orphaned heroine into unwitting sexual relations with her estranged son, her long lost father and her previously unimagined brother. It's incest played as black farce, with the heavy irony so typical of Sade in storyteller mode. Does *Helter Skelter* bother itself with the sick charms of this source material? Of course not. There's no implication of incest, no sobbing virtue tricked into sinfulness, and no way of squaring the narrator's "excess of sensibility" with the louche sexual behaviour of the characters in *Helter Skelter*. You might as well read aloud from a Jilly Cooper novel for all the difference it would make. But when Franco goes on to quote Sade's letter to his wife, it really is the limit: "Imperious, choleric, irascible, extreme in everything, with a dissolute imagination the like of which has never been seen, atheistic to the point of fanaticism, there you have me in a nutshell, and kill me again or take me as I am, for I shall not change." ⁴ If this speaks to Franco's sense of self it's a pity there's no through-line to the screen, because *Helter Skelter* is not imperious, nor irascible, and in no compelling way 'extreme'. It's just slapdash and tedious: bogus experimentalism.

Those for whom Franco is always a man with a plan, a method to his madness, may find these remarks unpalatable. And of course, if you feel like it, you can bang an interpretative hammer against the components of *Helter Skelter* until they fuse into some kind of shape, albeit dictated, let's be honest, by your own perspiring effort. Instead of doing that, I'll end with a quote from the same book used throughout *Helter Skelter*: the Grove Press edition of *The 120 Days of Sodom*. It's from Simone De Beauvoir's essay "Must We Burn Sade?" and it talks about Sade's reputation in French literature and history: "One may glance through heavy, detailed works on 'The Ideas of the Eighteenth Century,' or even on 'The Sensibility of the Eighteenth Century,' without once coming upon his name. It is understandable that as a reaction against this scandalous silence Sade's enthusiasts have hailed him as a prophetic genius; they claim that his work heralds Nietzsche, Stirner, Freud, and surrealism. But this cult, founded, like all cults, on a misconception, by deifying the 'divine marquis' only betrays him." ⁵

Music: The opening credits are accompanied by Daniel J. White's "Monologue Pour Saxo Ténor" from *Monologue Pour...* (1972), electronically treated with the same device used on Michelle Bauer's voice in *Lust for Frankenstein* (1998). We also hear White's "Offertoire N°2" from the library compilation LP *Grandes Orgues De Notre Temps* (1976). Later, his "Monologue Pour Voix" is layered over itself, and then superimposed with his "Monologue Pour Saxo Ténor" to score a lesbian interlude between Romay and Tienda. Most strikingly, Alain Petit contributes four recordings for solo



TOP: Madame Champville (Lina Romay). BOTTOM LEFT: Analía Ivars, one of Madame Champville's whores, in unused footage culled from Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell. BOTTOM RIGHT: Madame Champville catches her girlfriend with a man and takes the betrayal badly.

electric guitar which veer from traditional bluesiness to exciting feedback lunacy. As a loyal participant and long-standing supporter of Franco's vision, his recordings deserve a better platform.

Locations: Málaga.

Connections: A close-up detail of the sun in Caspar David Friedrich's painting "Easter Morning" (ca. 1828-1835) appears under the opening credits. Later on we see the whole picture: a haunting landscape showing three women walking down a sparsely wooded road at dawn. Often interpreted as a meditation on a biblical theme – three women on the morning after Jesus's death, taking jars filled with spices and balm to care for his body – it's one of the most celebrated paintings by this Lutheran artist who once wrote: "*The noble person recognizes God in everything.*"⁶ Quite what this has to do with sadomasochistic lesbians and the Marquis De Sade is anybody's guess, but it sure is a pretty picture... Franco also cuts to images drawn from the work of Alfonso Azpiri, an artist for the cult comic-book *Heavy Metal*, whose most famous character was a gigantically buxom female Goddess called Lorna ...

Camille Pissarro's painting "Rue Saint-Honoré, dans l'après-midi – Effet de pluie" (1897) suggests a link to France, homeland of the divine Marquis. Pissarro preferred painting rural subjects but turned his hand to cityscapes from his apartment window in Paris when he was forced by illness to move there for treatment. In 2000, when *Helter Skelter* was made, Franco was still mobile and reasonably healthy; within five or six years he would begin to have difficulty walking, and by the turn of the decade he spent most of his time in a wheelchair, cooped up in his apartment as Pissarro had been... We also see close-ups of Paul Klee's "Revolving House", a Cubist work painted in 1921. According to the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, "*Klee presents his vision of the city through a series of buildings projecting from an imaginary central axis around which they appear to revolve.*"⁷ Quite how Klee's 'vision of the city' dovetails with a film that lacks any location filming is a challenge to interpretation, but hey, dig the reference to cubism ...

On the coffee table during Lina Romay's scenes is an A4 print of the most famous (indeed one of the only) classical nudes in Spanish painting, "Venus at her Mirror" aka "The Rokeby Venus" by Diego Velázquez. At one point Franco cuts from a bare bottom being spanked to a close-up detail of the Rokeby Venus's rear: in which case, surely 'Spanking Venus' would have made a better title than *Helter Skelter*? We also see Lina browsing through *Las tres caras del terror*, a book on Spanish horror cinema edited by Alberto Santos. On the cover, though scarcely legible in the film, are pictures of Jacinto Molina, Narcisco Ibañez Serrador and Jess Franco ... The belt with large metallic discs worn by Mavi Tiena and Lina Romay in the film was previously seen in the treasure chest belonging to Don Martin in *Broken Dolls*.

Other versions: When reissued on DVD in 2010, a duplication error resulted in approximately two minutes of the film being skipped. This occurs during the credits sequence and does not detract from the film's sexual content, although it does mean that the screen credit for the Marquis De Sade goes missing.

VAMPIRE JUNCTION

USA, 2001

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Production companies

One Shot Productions

Impacto Films

Timeline

shooting		2001
Video premiere	September	2002

Running time

US 'Sub Rosa' VHS	84m
RUS 'Artvideo' DVD	94m47s
US 'Sub Rosa' uncut DVD	97m

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. executive producers: **Tommy Chase**, **Sol Clink** [as 'Sol Klink'], **Casey Yip**, **Kevin Collins**. music: **Exequiel Cohen**. additional music: **Jess Franco**. organ music composed and performed by **Daniel J. White**. director of photography: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. editor: **Guillermo A. Morales**. digital editor: **Curro Perea** [as 'Kurro Maiden']. 1st assistant director: **Lina Romay**. second assistant director: **Viktor Seastrom** [as 'Peter Södestrom']. production manager: **Bill Mendoza**. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as 'A. Gutierrez']. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. electricians: **Mario Kafer**, **Aitor Renduelez** [as 'Renduelez']. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky**. make-up: **Maria Rodona**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'J. Phre']. digital sound: **Guillermo A. Morales**. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. Laboratories: **U.M.T. Singen**. *Additional credits on the One Shot website:* editor: **Lina Romay**. producers: **Kevin Collins**, **Tommy Chase**, in conjunction with **Impacto Films**. associate producer: **Karen Wong**. post-production: **Quattro Vision**. based on an original story by **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Lina Romay** (Alice Brown, a journalist). **Sandra Olsen** (punk vampire girl). **Viktor Seastrom** (Father Flanagan, a vampire). **Paul Lapidus** (Sheriff Joe Mendoza). **Steve Barrymore** (Dr. Frank Spencer). **Fata Morgana** (Countess Irina). **Exequiel Caldas** (Macario aka 'Andy Devine' aka 'Dean Martin', drunk). *Uncredited:* **Mabel Escaño** (guide to the world of shadows)

Synopsis: *A journalist named Alice Brown receives a tape recording from a Doctor Spencer, alerting her to strange happenings in a town called Shit City, USA. Deciding to investigate, she arrives to find the place virtually deserted. She meets a drunk called Macario, who insists he's actually called 'Andy Devine' or 'Dean Martin', and the town sheriff Joe Mendoza. The sheriff tells her to leave immediately, but when she*

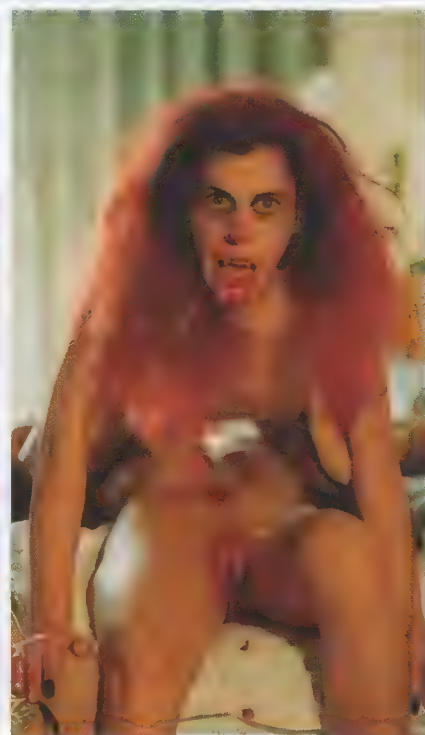
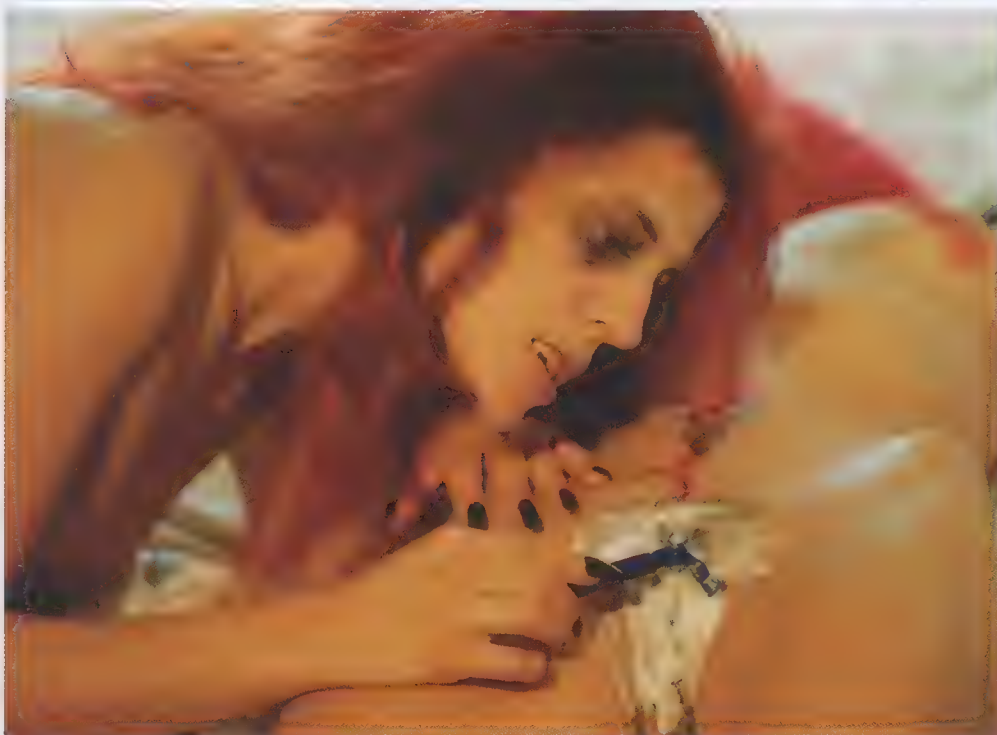
insists on looking for Spencer he gives her directions to the local bar (about twenty feet away). There she meets Spencer, who tells her that the reason the town is deserted is because it has been over-run by vampires! Spencer's gun-toting wife, who runs the inn, won't let him say more, chiefly because she too is secretly a vampire. Alice takes a room at the inn, not knowing that her room is bilocated with an alternate reality where vampires live. During the night she has strange dreams about a drunken girl being seduced by a vampiress. Waking the next morning, she finds Spencer dead, impaled on a spear held by the carved wooden Indian standing at the bar entrance. Spencer's wife has vanished. Alice tries to write up her experiences on her laptop, but the words "Father Flanagan is calling you" appear on the screen. She goes looking for him in the Forest of Chapultepec and encounters a mystical old woman who gives her a website address. Alice returns to Shit City and spends time at an amusement arcade with a mechanical rodeo machine. As she writes up her notes, Macario pretends to be a rodeo rider and whoops it up. Again he warns her to leave. Sheriff Mendoza sees vampires arriving at the bar. They are led by Father Flanagan, who wears a vampire cape. Mendoza tries to shoot them but Father Flanagan attacks and kills him. He disappears with Mendoza's body, leaving only his cape behind. Macario finds the garment and shows it to Alice, but she has had enough of the town and returns to her room, planning to leave Shit City. Before she can leave the room, she sees two female vampires making out on her bed. They crawl across the floor, grip her between their thighs, and drag her back to the bed where they ravish her in a series of ever more gymnastic ways. Father Flanagan enters, and bites her. The vampires disappear, taking their victim with them. Alice will never leave Shit City...

Review: What in the name of sanity is going on in *Vampire Junction*? It's a project so determinedly peculiar that it achieves a sort of concussed magnificence. While it suffers from the perennial problems of the One Shot era, it's so persistently bizarre that I believe the strangeness was part of the design, not just a random side-effect, or a case of the critic staring at the wall until faces come out of the wallpaper. *Vampire Junction* is confusing and often incoherent, but there's plenty going on tucked away within Franco's dauntingly casual but in this case distinctly lysergic approach.

It's not long before we're assailed by an eerie sense of disjuncture. The film begins with a credit sequence depicting a woman (Lina Romay) driving at night as heavy rain blots out the road ahead. This is rendered via close-up shots of Romay's face through the rain-spattered windscreen, to which colour optical effects have been added, making the image semi-abstract, like a heavily digitised version of the credit sequence for *Taxi Driver*. Although Romay's hair is cut short in a masculine style, and the video optical effects are quite intense, we can see that she's a woman, which makes it very puzzling when a male voice-over begins to speak in the first person, describing events which match, to some extent, what we're seeing onscreen: "I used to be a family doctor, as well as a travelling salesman, in Pet Wolf County in the South West. I used to cross over once a month to visit my clients, or my patients. One hot morning in June I started my journey very early as usual, through the desert lands. The

highway was long and lonely, and the sun shined relentlessly. Suddenly it started to cloud over, and the rain came down from nowhere, falling on the barren land with such violence I had to stop my car. Unable to see the road through the windshield, I parked beside the road. When it cleared up after two or three hours of flooding, I discovered to my surprise I was at the entrance of a small town that I'd never seen before. A big enormous pretentious placard said, 'You are arriving at Shit City.'" We see the woman pull off the main road because of the rain, and arrive (in a single edit) at a place that looks suspiciously like an amusement resort themed around the Wild West. Welcome to Shit City...

Already there's a lot of 'weird shit' to figure out. The narrator says he was both a doctor and a travelling salesman, and crossed the border to visit both clients and customers. This doubling of occupation, and the notion that he crossed county lines to look after his patients, in combination with the gender disparity of the image and voice-over, create an unstable factual matrix. The synchronicity between the voice-over's description of being rained off the road and the images of Romay's rain-splattered windscreen encourages us to spend these first few minutes trying to fit the contradictory elements together too. However, the voice-over comes across as completely illogical, ignoring the already fragile cause and effect of the film whilst both confirming and contradicting what we see. "From the very first moment I walked the few streets of the small town, I got the strange impression of walking on the sidewalks of a lost cemetery, or an old Hollywood B-film set whose last inhabitants were Tom Tyler or Bob Steele. The few human beings who passed my way were pale and silent, the few stores were empty or closed. I decided, even if I was strangely exhausted, to leave that worrying town. But my car refused to start." This soliloquy (clumsily written, like most of the dialogue) is delivered over a shot of Alice walking through the town soon after arriving. We don't see her attempting to leave, we don't see the 'pale and silent' individuals mentioned in the voice-over, but we do see something vaguely reminiscent of a Hollywood film set, so we continue to try and fit what we're seeing with what we're hearing, even though the gender difference is now very obvious. Alice meets the Sheriff of Shit City and says that she's seeking a man called Frank Spencer (which to British viewers of a certain age will conjure inappropriate sitcom memories). After a tense encounter with Spencer, who tells her that the town is riddled with vampires, and a run-in with his fearsome-looking wife, who behaves menacingly, Alice goes to bed in the hotel run by this strange couple. Next morning, having been visited by vampires in her dreams, she finds Spencer's dead body, apparently speared by a life-sized wooden Indian which stands beside the door to the hotel saloon. As she roams the 'streets' looking for help, the male voice-over throws us this curveball: "Now, five years later, still I stay here. It was here that I met my wife." Puzzlement reaches its apex, forty-two minutes into the story, until at last the voice-over reveals its provenance. After musing on the name of the town ("I'm afraid in a short time they will call it Bone City, or Flanagan's Mausoleum") the speaker signs off with the words "Dr. Francis G. Spencer." The voice-over we've been hearing since the start of the film was a recording



TOP: Alice (Lina Romay) finds Dr. Frank Spencer (Steve Barrymore) dead; apparently murdered by a carved wooden Indian statue outside his pub.
 BOTTOM LEFT and RIGHT: In Alice's dream, Countess Irina (Fata Morgana) shaves the pussy of her punk vampire acolyte (Sandra Olsen) and sucks blood from it.

made by Dr. Spencer! Presumably, given that it continues after he turns up dead, what we're hearing is a tape recording which he sent to Alice, who came to Shit City to meet him...

The next scene offers a 'hinge' upon which one could hang a theory of form in *Vampire Junction*. It involves a street bum called Macario who sees the Sheriff being attacked by vampires, who are led by an undead priest, Father Flanagan. Trying to help, he points a gun at the vampires and exclaims, "Bam! Bam! Bam!". When the 'bullets' do no harm he stares at the gun in dismay, before throwing it away as useless. This gag is a tight Escher-like coil in which fictional and meta-fictional levels switch back on each other. The joke has two layers: we laugh not only at the meta-narrative gag ("Bam! Bam! Bam!") but because the character believes that his fake gunshots should have worked. Thus we're snapped out of the fictional world by a deliberate absurdity, only to be pulled back into the fiction by the character's reactions. Could this be a metaphor for Franco's entire *modus operandi* here? The whole film is a wrestling match between reality and simulation. Video footage gives everything a flattened sense of clinical reality, like handycam footage taken on holiday, but the flagrant fakery of this wild west amusement park on the Costa del Sol subverts 'reality' on two fronts: we're seeing a kitsch simulation of the Old West, with a cheap and tacky air of unreality, while at the same time the actors play characters who not only claim to live there but also adopt personas to match. Shit City has a Sheriff dressed in wild west costume, and Macario speaks with a cartoonish Mexican accent. Meanwhile the image is relayed to us at a videotape standard of 30fps, giving everything a queasy surplus of reality. Fakery and realism intertwine as Lina Roday, Exequiel Caldas and Paul Lapidus hover undecidably between the two, giving lenticular performances. Alice speaks naturalistically, in English, with a heavy but contemporary Spanish accent. Macario, one of the few residents of Shit City who hasn't been bitten by the vampires, speaks like Speedy Gonzales. We're clearly in the present day; Alice drives a modern car and uses a laptop, Macario has a mobile phone, and the sinister Father Flanagan has a website! And yet Macario asks Alice, seemingly in all sincerity, if she's seen Billy the Kid, whose wanted poster he is sticking to a telegraph pole...

Franco destabilises cause and effect into the bargain. A scene in which Alice is attacked by Father Flanagan and the vampire women in a hotel corridor appears to establish that Alice has been bitten by the creatures. But then we cut to a scene of her sitting unharmed in her hotel room, typing up her notes. She's wearing a white low-cut T-shirt, so we can see her neck clearly: there are no bite marks. She makes no mention of being attacked, and the notion of her becoming a vampire is not borne out by subsequent events. So what did we see happening in the hallway? We're not even encouraged to read it as a dream; there are no 'bracketing scenes' to lend such a context. Then there's the question of identification. Alice is the protagonist of the story, and in the normal run of things her position as the innocent, entering a surreal and dangerous situation, would make her the heroine. She's a journalist investigating strange occurrences, under threat from a

mysterious clan of vampires. Simple enough, you might think, once the gender confusion of the voice-over is out of the way. But in a scene that pulls the rug out from under us yet again, the Sheriff accosts Alice with these words: "*Don't play the innocent, I've got all the information about you from Kentucky. You've got a brilliant career of crimes. Pronounced an instigator of prostitution. Accused of [inaudible] with simulated whip wounds. Suspected of corruption of minors in '98.*" Alice is indignant, but she doesn't deny it. Instead she offers the hardened criminal's verbal one-finger: "*But I never was condemned!*" Mendoza replies, "*You will tell all your lies to the Judge! Now you are fucked!*" If we take Alice's response to mean 'I was never convicted', it sounds like she's boasting about getting away with it. If you're innocent, you say so, you don't crow that the prosecution failed to pin anything on you! Then there's the line about 'simulated whip sounds'. Unfortunately a very loud crash of thunder obliterates the rest of this remark, but what on earth could her crime be? The very mention of simulation, in a film rife with weird irony, blatant fakery, flimsy facades and meta-cinematic games, seems only to add to the sense that what's at stake in *Vampire Junction* is the erosion of the line between simulated space and real space, between meaning it and faking it.

A preoccupation with simulation is borne out by the script's reference to the Forest of Chapultepec, which Alice is told to visit to find out more about the vampire Father Flanagan. This is a slightly misspelled/misremembered reference to the Forest of Chapultepec, an enormous park in Mexico City. The word 'Chapultepec' means 'at the grasshopper hill' in Nahuatl, and refers to a large rock formation in the park. The area has vestigial ruins going back to the Toltecs. Originally, the land was a forest outside Tenochtitlan (capital of the Aztec Empire in the 15th century), but today it's maintained as a park entirely within Mexico City, containing museums, amusement parks, sculptures, lakes and fountains. In other words, this ancient historical site has been absorbed into modern city planning, with traces of ancient Aztec and Toltec architecture left standing as signifiers of their own historical destruction, within a postmodern context of entertainment, leisure and capital. This chimes very neatly with the material used to create Shit City, namely a tourist amusement park in Torremolinos, a city already stripped of any historic Spanishness and restructured to cater entirely to the needs of foreign (chiefly English-speaking) consumers. Remember that Franco had previously used the fictional setting Shit City in *Los blues de la calle Pop* in 1982, when it was represented by tourist-dominated Benidorm. Franco's words about Benidorm are worth repeating here: "*There is a place in Spain which is kind of a set, an enormous set, called Benidorm. Benidorm was kind of a fishing village thirty years ago when I went there for the first time. And now it's an enormous town with buildings with forty flats and things like that. But very badly done! Very nasty architects, awful colors. And so I decided to make a story [...] set in that town, you know, in the confusion of that town. Because it's not a real town. It's a set. It's an unbelievable place. Nobody was born there, but in summertime there are four-hundred thousand people there... It's mysterious, And so I wanted*

to put my story in the middle of this madness.”¹ This makes it very clear that Franco was interested in the postmodern situation as it applied to architecture and culture: *Vampire Function*’s ironic play with appearances, treating the shabbiest of illusions as though they are real, and then populating them with characters who live in a synthetic ‘Wild West’ environment marked by depletion, poverty and kitsch, is therefore far from accidental. Perhaps it also explains why Franco chose to make a vampire story here: vampires are a mythic menace but there are still many people who feel that they could exist, that they are in some way symbolic of a real danger (‘psychic vampires’) or that they have roots in something not entirely fictional. In that case they are liminal beings, so it makes sense to depict them in a liminal space, especially one where the boundary between reality and illusion, fantasy and fakery, has been worn away...

“The few days I stayed in this country are the most surrealistic I ever lived,” writes Alice, typing up her story sitting in a deserted amusement arcade called ‘Rodeo Loco’, the centrepiece of which is a mechanised rodeo bull. Perhaps we can glean from her shaky grasp of past and present tenses that she’s not really a journalist? Maybe she really is the pimp and child molester the Sheriff accused her of being? Meanwhile the faded line between reality and simulation is brought to the fore yet again, when Macario mounts the amusement park’s mechanical rodeo bull and rides on it, whooping and hooting, despite the fact that the machine is turned off. “It’s better to do something here, or you’ll die of sorrow,” he tells her. There’s something forlornly childlike about his behaviour, but his statement suggests an adult’s deliberation: he’s choosing to act like a child at a fairground, even though the fairground is switched off, because simulated fun is better than no fun at all. Of course he could embrace the “sorrow” of his condition, wake up, and stop living in an inauthentic existence in a world of garbage entertainment. Maybe even leave Torremolinos and get a job working for Jess Franco in Málaga, much to the dismay of Exequiel Caldas, who would be rather freaked out to discover there were two of him...

On a sheerly tactile or abstract level, there are some very beautiful and haunting images in *Vampire Function*. Twice in the film we see Alice driving in the rain, her features weirdly deformed by the rivulets as we look at her through the windshield. Franco shoots her with a real aesthete’s eye for the random beauty of water. These scenes, although quite obviously achieved by having someone pour buckets of water down the windscreen, are staggeringly beautiful. The lighting and the post-production optical tweaking turn the features of Franco’s greatest actress into a shifting post-human nightmare. For once, the artificiality of his optical fx and his low-tech video quality alchemise into something genuinely haunting. If you saw these frames blown up and framed in MoMA they would not look out of place. Narratively, their placement in the story is wilfully devoid of structural logic: it seems that Alice, like Spencer before her, has decided to leave Shit City, although we didn’t see her get into her car, nor did she talk about leaving. When some

kind of bird crashes into her windscreen she decides to turn back, but her decision to return is no more integrated into the story than her decision to leave; the scene just happens in an atomised ‘cell’ of its own.

As befits a film with so capricious a narrative structure, let’s pause a moment here to talk about credit sequences. *Vampire Function* is typical of the One Shot productions inasmuch as its credit sequence runs way too long: eight minutes. *Snakewoman* is the winner in this category: it takes eleven and a half minutes to get past the director’s namecheck. *Dr. Wong’s Virtual Hell* strings the credits out for ten minutes, *Helter Skelter* and *Broken Dolls* take seven minutes, while *Vampire Blues* and *Mari-Cookie* manage five. (The least indulgent is *Blind Target*, whose credits clock in at a brisk two and a half minutes.) Such absurdly long credit sequences obstruct the process of getting on with the story, needlessly delaying the point at which we can forget about technicalities and enter the fictional world. To make matters worse, the credit sequence of *Vampire Function* presents us with images of the vampire women long before we actually meet them, and Franco has them staring down the lens as if posing for a Gothic Babes Vampire Calendar (‘Meet Miss October – she wants your Halloweenie!’). Thankfully, they’re oblivious to the camera later in the film...

To be honest, the vampires in *Vampire Function* are the least interesting thing about it, which doesn’t of course prevent their sexual activities from gobbling up forty minutes of screen time. There’s a twenty minute dream sequence depicting two ghostly women making out on a bed, with one shaving the other’s pussy, and there’s another twenty minute scene at the end of the film, when the ghosts appear in the daytime and drag Alice into a threesome, in preparation for the arrival of their evil guru, Father Flanagan. These scenes are no better and no worse than most of the other sapphic sex interludes in the post 1990s productions, although the glam-punk trappings and high exposure photography give the film a sort of retro-cheapo-futurism: *Blade Runner* meets *Liquid Sky* at *Café Flesh*, on a budget of fifty Euros. And we do at least learn something new about vampires: they love the taste of shaving foam. Fata Morgana gamely licks it off the partly shaved pubis of Sandra Olsen as though it’s whipped cream (which must have been pretty unpleasant in reality). The highlight of the vampire plot strand is a very weird scene in which Olsen does ‘the crab’, walking on all fours in the nude with her back bent right over. Beat that, Christopher Lee. It’s followed by the sight of Olsen and a similarly nude Fata Morgana dragging Lina Roday to their bed using only their knees, a feat of surreal gymnastics echoed a few minutes later by a lesbian threesome that sees the women stacking up on each other like some obscene circus act. I was reminded of the marauding bare bottoms in José Mojica Marins’ *Awakening of the Beast* (1970).

Overall, *Vampire Function* is the weirdest and wildest of the One Shot productions. You will probably need to have seen a few of them already to enjoy it without suffering a violent reaction to the quality, but once you’ve sighed and shrugged and resigned yourself to the

nastiness of video as a medium, this is as freakily weird as anything in Franco's filmography. The only thing that really makes me grit my teeth in despair is the voice-over performance by an absolutely dreadful English actor. His line readings are unbelievably bad, and it's frankly mind-boggling that he was given the job. Not only that, but he dubs Carsten Frank in Franco's next film *Incubus*! What kind of wicked blackmailer's hold did he have over the producers? This problem aside, however, I would nominate *Vampire Function* as maybe the best, certainly the craziest, Franco project of the One Shot era.

Cast and crew: Exequiel Caldas once again turns on the charm, this time in an amusing and rather sweet way, saying to Romay, "Hey wait! Don't you want to see a couple of things more? I'm a good cook, and I could cuddle you. I'm very cute, you know!"

Music: *Vampire Function*'s score is like no other in Franco's career, inasmuch as it takes an electro-acoustic or acousmatic approach, combined with musique concrète. The electronic ingredients are a series of whoops, whistles and rapidly passing bleeps, like the slipstream of a virtual spacecraft or drifting signals on short wave radio; the musique concrète elements (achieved via sampling keyboard rather than tape splicing) include various chunks of orchestral music, a few rather lurid orchestral 'stabs' of the sort that turned up in the early sampler music of bands like Propaganda, Pet Shop Boys and Frankie Goes to Hollywood, mixed with slowed down fragments of classical instruments, such as piano and guitar. There's also a creative use of sound effects: for instance a vampire sex scene in a hotel room, intercut with close-ups of Romay driving through a rainstorm, is scored to the constant sound of windscreen wipers in the rain ... The score also includes a song by Exequiel Caldas, which sounds like a kissing cousin to "Secret Side" by Nico, and Daniel White's "Offertoire N°2" from the library compilation LP *Grandes Orgues De Notre Temps* (1976), the latter of which became quite a fixture in Franco's later films.

Locations: Tivoli World in Benalmádena.

Connections: 'Shit City' is a call-back to 1982's *Los blues de la calle Pop* ... Both Tom Tyler and Bob Steele were popular American stars primarily in Westerns of the silent and early sound era, although Steele made his biggest splash as the sadistic Curley in *Of Mice and Men* (1939) ... "You call this dragon-water whiskey?" asks Alice. "It's Scottish. From Loch Ness," says Macario ... *Vampire Function* is the first Franco film to mention a web address: Alice is told to contact the evil Father Flanagan by visiting www.vampireflanagan.com ... Alice writes her stories on an IBM laptop ... "Nights are very long here, and days too," says Macario, echoing a line from Franco's 1971 film *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*: "Here the nights pass rather slowly. As slowly as the days". Is there a filament of *A Virgin Among the Living Dead* in the story of *Vampire Function*? A woman arrives at a strange dwelling to find that nearly everyone there is a member of the undead. She ignores repeated advice to leave, but when she wants to leave she can't, and eventually she's sexually ravished by the undead, thus becoming one of them ... "Don't call me Macario, I'm Andy Devine," says Macario, a reference to the actor

who played Roy Rogers's sidekick Cookie in ten of the 'Roy Rogers and Trigger' films (including *The Gay Ranchero*, *On the Old Spanish Trail*, *Under California Stars* and *Eyes of Texas*) ... When Macario sings tuneless country and western with a hint of "She'll be coming round the mountain" he calls it "From The Best of Pete Seeger". Given that Caldas's scat lyrics refer to 'going down the river' it's probably Seeger's version of "Sailing Up, Sailing Down" that he's channelling.

INCUBUS

USA, 2002

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Production company

One Shot Productions

DVD distributors

Sub Rosa (USA)

Timeline

shooting	2002
Video premiere	September 2002

Running time

US 'One Shot' DVD	77m38s
US 'Sub Rosa' DVD	83m19s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. additional dialogue: **Kevin Collins**. executive producers: **Tommy Chase**, **Sol Clink** [as 'Sol Klink'], **Casey Yip**, **Kevin Collins**. piano solos: **Daniel J. White**. Theme from the film "The Black Countess" from the original soundtrack by **Daniel J. White**. 1st assistant director: **Lina Romay**. second assistant director: **José Roberto Vila** [as 'J. Roberto Vila']. production manager: **Bill Mendoza**. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as 'Al Gutierrez']. **Juan José Villar**. sound editor: **Guillermo Morales**. digital editor: **Alejandro Argüelles**. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. electricians: **Mario Kafer**, **Aitor Renduelez**. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'R. Schargorodsky']. make-up: **Javier Díez**. special effects: **Joaquín Sánchez Miranda** [as 'J. Phre']. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. Laboratories: **U.M.T. Singen**. *Uncredited*: director of photography: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Sonja Lechner** [as 'Carina Palmer'] (Lucy Harker/Lorna). **Carsten Frank** (John Harker, Lucy's father). **Lina Romay** (Rosa Harker, Lucy's mother). **Fata Morgana**. *Uncredited:* **Steve Barrymore**. **Exequiel Caldas** (Dave, the Harkers' servant).

Synopsis: John Harker is a successful artist, who twenty years ago made a pact with a woman called Lorna. After becoming involved in a sadomasochistic relationship with her, he'd agreed to hand over his future daughter on her twentieth birthday, in return for a successful career. Immediately afterwards, he became world famous and his life has been comfortable ever since. Now his daughter Lucy is twenty, and Lorna is back in touch, demanding that John keep his side of the bargain. John tells his wife Rosa, and she orders him to confront Lorna and cut off all ties with her. When he tries, Lorna reacts scornfully and threatens him with dire consequences if he reneges on their deal. John tries to shoot Lorna but the bullets do no harm. Back home, John is seduced by his daughter into admitting that he fantasises about sex with her. They embrace and kiss, but they're interrupted, first by a knock at the window from Flora, a servant, and then by Rosa, who begins to thrash around and scream on her bed. When John tries to calm his wife, she attacks him, before ejecting a snake from her vagina. As John's life collapses, Lucy is led away by the male servants of Lorna, and subjected to a prolonged ritual in which her soul takes the place of Lorna's in Hell...

Production notes: On a dark and stormy night, not so long ago, a wicked witch put a curse on Jess Franco. Incensed by rumours that he was planning a sequel to *The Killer Barbys*, she hit him where it would hurt the most. She cursed one of the best films of his career, one of his own personal favourites: *Lorna... the Exorcist*. In a wink of the witch's eye the film ceased to exist. The negative, the elements, the 35mm prints, stills and posters and pressbooks and hundreds of scrappy old videos, all disappeared in a puff of evil vapour. Video collectors around the world found a gap on their shelves where the film had once been. And to Franco's dismay, fans no longer even remembered the film! There were no reviews on file, no magazine articles from the 1970s, no mention in *Obsession* or *The Manacoa Files*. At a single stroke, the witch had plucked the film from existence... The following evening a foul gust of wind blew a typewritten note through Franco's letterbox: "Abandon your Killer Barbys sequel, or the Black Countess dies next!" Franco trembled with rage. He was dealing with a sorceress of tremendous power – but he wasn't beaten yet. Everyone else had forgotten *Lorna* but his own recollection was intact. If the film no longer existed, he would have to remake it! He rewrote the script from memory and arranged a speedy new video deal with One Shot Productions. *Lorna* would rise again...

It soon became obvious that something was wrong. No matter how hard Franco tried to reproduce the spellbinding intensity of *Lorna*, nothing worked. The actors were impossible to coach, the video image looked atrocious, and worse still, Franco felt his skills deserting him. He couldn't concentrate; his thoughts were distracted and confused. Little by little, *Lorna* was fading from his memory. Had he forgotten something important? Something to do with seafood? His knowledge of the film was dissolving, like a dream in the autumn dawn. The reason was clear: the witch had found out about his One Shot production, and was using her

powers to prevent it. Watching his new footage, Franco felt close to despair. A perfectly good dubbing session came back from the studio sounding unbelievably amateurish, as though idiots had replaced the real cast. The film looked and sounded like shit. With an hour of terrible footage down on tape, he was close to giving up. What good would it do to release such a travesty? Better for *Lorna* to disappear...

It was at this point that a wise old woman, a mystic living in the hills outside Málaga, came to Franco's aid. Detecting malefic vibrations around the beleaguered director, when she met him one evening in a hotel bar, she was moved to help lift the malediction. She devised a strategy that would take the aggressor completely by surprise. First she would perform a ritual to hold back the witch's powers, thus allowing Franco to shoot one last scene in the hotel bar, when everyone else was asleep. The scene itself would be two things: the climax of his new production, and a genuine magic ritual to defeat the curse. The mystic's secret weapon was simple but immensely effective: the power of the phallus. The witch, knowing that Franco was a worshipper of women and a denigrator of the male sex, would have put up no defence against phallic magic!

At the appointed hour, three men, adorned with curved ceremonial penises of enormous size, enacted the ritual, while Franco filmed 'Lorna', the film's villainess, preparing to possess Lucy, the heroine, by means of occult rape. Lorna sported a ceremonial penis too, carved into the form of a demonic snake. In the story, the snake phallus would be the organ of Lucy's destruction; in the ritual working it would be the engine of Franco's deliverance ... The old woman cast her spell, holding back the witch's malediction, and immediately Franco's talent returned. The scene was working! Not only as a climax to the film, but as a magical rite of occult power. Nineteen minutes later, with a terrible shriek that echoed through the minds of the assembled cast and crew, the wicked witch withered and wailed, and withdrew from the astral plane. Her powers shrivelled as her curse came back threefold ("I could have sworn that was bunkum," she fumed) ... Before disappearing into the night air of Málaga, the mystic gave Franco a final warning: "You must release this new film, send it out into the world, and be glad of how dreadful it is. Call it something really stupid, like 'Incubus'. For as long as it receives an IMDb rating of 3.5 or less, you are safe from further attack."

The following morning, in the hotel lobby, a young man came running up to Franco: "Maestro! Signor Franco! You are a genius! I love your films, especially *Lorna... the Exorcist*!" Franco smiled and thanked the young man, then stepped from the hotel lobby into the sunshine of Málaga. Pulling his mobile phone from his pocket, he rang the Killer Barbies...

Review: A flat and charmless effort, *Incubus* plummets like a stone to the lower regions of Franco's filmography. French critic Jean-Pierre Bouyxou once described Franco's 1975 film *Julietta*

69 as “self-sabotage”. *Incubus* is worse than self-sabotage: it’s self-desecration, a sketch done in magic marker on top of a haunting watercolour (*Lorna... the Exorcist*). It’s relentlessly banal, and burdened with the most terrible English-language dub I think I’ve ever heard. From its cack-handed title (Lorna is a succubus, surely?) to the amateurish efforts of the cast, *Incubus* is virtually irredeemable. Occasionally a line is so bathetic that you have to laugh, and the glum mood is dispelled for a moment; for instance when world-renowned artist John Harker shows his wife his latest sketch, saying, “*This is an homage to your tits.*”

“*Silly boy. You can’t kill me, I don’t exist. I’m an incubus, I only haunt your mind,*” says Lorna. Given that incubi are male (the female equivalent being succubi), perhaps ‘she’ is a transvestite, an incubus in succubus’s clothing? In which case, John’s S&M dalliance with Lorna takes on a more perverse aspect. Nothing in the plot bears this out, however, unless we count the rubber snake jutting from Lorna’s crotch during the final scene, which because it’s so clearly fake one tends to assume is a ceremonial strap-on. Perhaps it’s meant to be the real thing – a transvestite incubus’s penis? Somehow I doubt it...

This brings us to the saving grace of the film. The last nineteen minutes depict a sex-magic ritual in which Lorna claims Lucy, body and soul. It’s strange and mesmerising, very Jess Franco, and feels like a totally different film. Shooting in an out-of-hours bar, apparently at night, Franco summons a ceremonial mood of suspension and mystery (albeit on videotape). The room is dominated by three mirrored pillars, each reflecting the other into infinity. By vision-mixing a second shot of the same room, mirrored in reverse, with the join concealed by the vertical edge of one of the pillars, Franco turns the space into a perplexing magical arena. Taking part in Lorna’s ceremony are two naked men, one black, the other Latino, both of whom sport giant prosthetic phalluses. These fearsome creations are hooked at the end, like the horrific pizzle of some Lovecraftian abomination. If you’ve ever wondered how Yog-Sothoth impregnated Lavinia Whateley in “The Dunwich Horror”... Admittedly the scene doesn’t work quite as well as it could have done. If the cast had been instructed not to cross the line where the two shots are composited, the illusion would have been more seamlessly maintained. The fact that they do suggests that the idea of flipping the image only occurred to Franco in post-production. Even so, some of the timeless weirdness of his celluloid work manages to break through here. It’s just a shame you have to wade through an hour of absolute rubbish to get there.

Cast and crew: Initially, Franco wanted Fred Williams (*Vampyros Lesbos*; *She Killed in Ecstasy*) for the male lead, but although overtures were made, he was unable to reach an agreement with the actor, with fees the most likely sticking point. Instead, Franco cast Carsten Frank, whom he’d met and got along with at a film festival in Munich in 2001. Frank went on to act for a second cult director reduced to working on video, Ulli Lommel, appearing in *Zombie Nation* (2004), *Daniel der Zauberer* (2004), *Green River*

Killer (2005), *Killer Pickton* (2006) and *The Raven* (2006), before signing up for projects by gore specialist Andreas Bethmann (the man behind the DVD company X-Rated Kultvideo who released several Jess Franco films in Germany) and pretentious animal-killing creep Marian Dora, director of *Melancholie der Engel* (2009), about whom the less said the better. Frank also set up his own DVD company, Quiet Village Filmkunst (named after a 1952 single by film soundtrack composer Les Baxter which was covered in typically bizarre style in 1959 by pioneering ‘exotica’ composer Martin Denny). Quiet Village would go on to co-finance Franco’s next film, *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula ...* The film’s sultry villainess was played by Sonja Lechner aka ‘Carina Palmer’, who told *Draculina* magazine in March 2002:

“*I met Jess Franco during a film festival in Munich last year. I had some small talk with him and Lina Romay. We talked about my dreaming of playing a part in a film. Lina smiled and said: “Who knows? Maybe sometimes a dream becomes reality.” During the next few days I recognized that Jess and Lina were watching me very carefully – my face, the way I move... then, during the last evening of the festival, Lina came to me with the screenplay of “Ballad For a Dead Harlot” and asked me if I wanted to play the lead female part! ... The next day Jess wanted to see me in his hotel. We had breakfast together and he showed me a treatment of Incubus. I liked it very much. It was a fascinating story and I had to play two parts – very different in character – which was very interesting to play but also very difficult. He invited me to come to Torremolinos in Spain the next month to start the shooting ... When I first arrived in Torremolinos Jess wanted me to play in both films but because of the lack of time – and the fact that “Ballad’s” co-producers were not ready – he decided to make only Incubus because I had to be back in Germany one month later.”¹*

Music: The magical rite at the end of the film draws heavily on Daniel White’s “Apocalypse No” from *Mood Music Selection No. 01 Cocktail*. Musically, the highlight of the film is the return of a sly, slippery tune by Daniel White, which we’ve not heard since *Je brûle de partout* in 1978. There’s also a reprise for the piano arrangement of the *Kiss Me Killer* theme tune. The main title theme from *Female Vampire* gets its umpteenth rebooking, and the title theme to *Barbed Wire Dolls* also adds its special menace to the final stages of the film.

Locations: The Harker house interior will turn up again as the principal location in *Snakewoman* and parts of *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*.

Connections: Lucy has a paperback copy of *The 120 Days of Sodom* by the Marquis De Sade ... The servant sleeps in a room with a poster for *Killer Barbys* and Herzog’s *Nosferatu* on his wall ... A copy of Klaus Kinski’s autobiography turns up in Rosa Harker’s bedroom ... John, a masochist, gives away his unborn daughter during sadomasochistic sex with Lorna, an idea explored in *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (1969), *Cocktail spécial* (1978) and *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* (1980), although in these stories the daughter is already alive and approaching maturity.

KILLER BARBYS VS. DRACULA

Spain & Germany, 2002

Alternative titles

Barby Dolls Vs. Doktor Satan (pre-shooting title?)

Production companies

Impacto Films (Spain)

Quiet Village Filmkunst (Germany)

DVD distributors

Atlas (Japan)

Image Entertainment (USA)

Timeline

shooting	June-July	2002
San Sebastián Film Festival, Spain	8 November	2002
Video premiere	September	2003

Running time

US DVD	85m25s
SP 'Vellavisión' DVD	85m17s

director: **Jess Franco**. executive producer: **Carsten Frank**. producer: **Jacinto Santos Parra**. assistant producer: **Michael Cholewa**. associate producer: **Tim Luna** [as 'Heiner Thimm']. screenplay: **Jess Franco**, **Rosa Almirall**, **José Roberto Vila**, based on a story by **Jess Franco** and **Jacinto Santos**. director of photography: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. music: **Jess Franco**. songs: **Killer Barbies**, **Bela B.**, **Die Ärzte**. art director: **Exequiel Cohen**. costumes: **Vanesa Guzmán**. direct sound: **M. Kalinski**. sound mixer: **John Wood**. sound mixer **Michael Bertels**. digital sound: **John Wood**. digital sound assistant: **Francisco Juan Burguillo** [as 'Curro Burguillo']. direct sound assistant: **Thomas Dietrich**. assistant director: **José Roberto Vila**. second assistant director: **Ernesto Ronchel**. art assistant: **Klaus Thiele**. make-up: **Javier Díez**, **Beatriz Galves**. hairdressing: **Candela Reyes**. special effects: **Joaquín Phre**. lighting assistant: **Javier Díez**. second camera assistant: **Frank Froeba**. machinist: **Matthias Genschel**. lighting assistant: **Uwe Jordan**. electricians: **Mario Kafer**, **Aitor Renduelez**. best boy: **Venancio Kantor**. gaffer: **Stella Maris**. lighting director/still photographer: **Emilio Schargorodsky**. second camera: **Viktor Seastrom** [as 'Peter Söderström']. wardrobe assistant: **Eva Beltran**. evening dresses for Silvia Superstar: **Anja Gockel**. wardrobe: **Vanesa Guzmán**. executive producer assistant: **Andreas Bonner**. executive producer assistant: **Exequiel Caldas**. telecine colourist: **Javier Mosqueda**. camera operator: **Javier Díez**. dog trainer: **Fata Morgana**. production assistant: **Viktor Seastrom**. *Uncredited*: costumes: **Elena Bagutta**. hair stylist: **Javier Díez**. hair and make-up stylist: **Bea Millas**. production

managers: **Exequiel Caldas**, **Emilio Schargorodsky**. production director: **Jacinto Santos Parra**.

Cast: **Silvia García Pintos** [as 'Silvia Superstar'] (Silvia). **Antonio Domínguez** [as 'Billy King'] (Billy). **Enrique Sarasola** (Count Dracula). **Dan van Husen** (Dr. Seward). **Aldo Sambrell** (Pepe Morgan). **Bela B.** [as 'Bela B. Felsenheimer'] (Bela Blasko). **Lina Romay** (Comrade Irina von Karstein). **Katja Bienert** (Katja von Barenbaum). **Carsten Frank** (Albinus). **Paul Lapidus** (Martin Fierro). **Pietro Martellanza** [as 'Peter Martell'] (Fake Dracula). **Anxo Bautista** (Dr. Muerte, bass player). **Carlos Fierro** (cameraman). **Rubén Sánchez** (assistant). **Javier Díez** (Viscontino). **Viktor Seaström** (Comrade Ivan). **Alfredo Lopez** (waiter #1). **Jose Luis Matoso** (waiter #2). **Carmen Montes** (gogo girl). **R. Robles Rafatal** (punk #1). **Pedro Olivares** (punk #2). **Sebastian Caldas** (punk #3). **Fran Aguilar** (punk #4). **Sandra Ibarra** (Sele). **Exequiel Caldas** (busker). **José Roberto Vila** (Inspector). **Godzilla** (himself). **Inka** (Manolita). *Uncredited*: **Bea Millas** (policeman). **Emilio Schargorodsky** (policeman).

Synopsis: While rehearsing on-site for a forthcoming concert at an amusement park in Spain, The Killer Barbies meet a man claiming to be Count Dracula. He turns out to be just an actor. A journalist who has been waiting to interview the band grabs an interview with the fake Count. A hearse pulls into the amusement park. It contains the mummy of Count Dracula, which the Transylvanian Tourist Board has sent on the road to raise money. It is chaperoned by Irina von Karlstein, a strict enforcer of discipline who regards the Spanish resort as a den of decadence. When the band hear that the body of the real Count is nearby they sneak off to take a look at it. Just as they find the coffin in a storage room nearby, Irina catches them and orders them to leave. The band practice their song "Wake up" which causes the stake in Dracula's chest to pull itself out. The Count goes on a killing spree, biting various individuals including Katja the journalist. The Count becomes fixated on the Killer Barbies' sexy lead singer Silvia. When the vampire's recent victims are discovered, the resort owner calls the famous vampire hunter Dr. Seward, along with his young assistant Albinus. Seward is now blind, but his other senses are highly attuned and he can detect supernatural presences better than any sighted person. Meanwhile Dracula kills the actor who claimed to be Dracula. Rejuvenated, he then kills Bela, a musician, plus Irina and her lackey, Ivan. During a live performance of the Killer Barbies, Dracula jumps up onstage and tries to bite Silvia. He also attacks her boyfriend Billy, the guitarist in the group. Dr. Seward suggests using Silvia as bait to lure Dracula into a trap. She goes for a walk around the town, and Count Dracula follows. The vampire hunters corner Dracula in a graveyard, and Silvia and Seward stake him through the heart. Dracula morphs into bat, then a cat, and finally into a toy white rabbit...

Production notes: In the summer of 2002, when a mooted project called "Killer Barbys vs. Frankenstein" (with Santiago Segura as Frankenstein) failed to materialise, Franco swiftly knocked together *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula*, with financial input from Carsten Frank's

Riesbuerg-based company Quiet Village Filmkunst, in association with Spanish DVD company Impacto Films.

Review: Filming once again at the Tivoli World amusement park in Benalmádena (see *Vampire Function*), and reuniting with Spanish rock band The Killer Barbies, Franco delivers a sequel surely no one was really asking for: *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula*. In *Vampire Function* he'd been inspired by the sheer absurd fakery of the Tivoli, a Costa del Sol tourist attraction featuring a simulated (and fairly small) Wild West town. He clearly wanted to tap into that vibe again, making this the second panel in a sort of diptych. Unfortunately, the results are meant to be uproariously funny, which means that everyone is 'camping it up' like panto season: the kiss of death for a film like this. Comedy is quicksilver, and Franco had neither the lightness of touch nor the conceptual rigor to make it work. Everything is fake alright, but the ability to play interesting games with fakery has deserted him. Instead there's bogus wit, from a script that can't land a single funny line; bogus storytelling, from a director who assembles a capable cast – Aldo Sambrell, Katja Bienert, Dan Van Husen, Paul Lapidus, Pietro Martellanza – and then leaves them standing around wondering what the hell they're doing; and bogus grunge/punk/pop from the Killer Barbies, who pull all the postures of a stadium rock act while acting as though they're an alternative to something.

Looking first at the 'Dracula' side of equation, Franco cues up his theme with a scene in which an actor playing Count Dracula is killed by the real McCoy. This could have been amusing, but the whole thing falls apart because the fake version, played by veteran Italian actor Pietro Martellanza, is ten times more compelling and believable than the 'real one', played by Enrique Sarasola; an irony Franco appears to have missed, given that Martellanza is bumped off after twenty minutes and Sarasola survives to the bitter end. Plumbing the murkiest depths of 'horror comedy', Sarasola's Dracula is just about unbearable to watch. It's the kind of performance you'd like to take down a lonely alley and strangle with your bare hands. Martellanza, on the other hand, has real gravitas, and an intriguing air of suppressed bitterness. Uniquely among the film's sketchy or farcical characters, he's someone you want to know more about. The actor's long grey hair is piled up on his head like an enormous ice cream, presumably to satirise Gary Oldman's gigantic wig in Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992), but if Franco intended to scorn the Coppola film by having this pompadoured actor killed by 'the genuine article', he blows it by allowing Sarasola to play the real Dracula as a cackling buffoon, with lots of corny rolling of the eyes and 'watch out I'm mad' facial expressions. I'm not a big fan of Coppola's version either, but Franco is on very shaky ground taking potshots at it, when he can't summon a single well-crafted scene of his own.

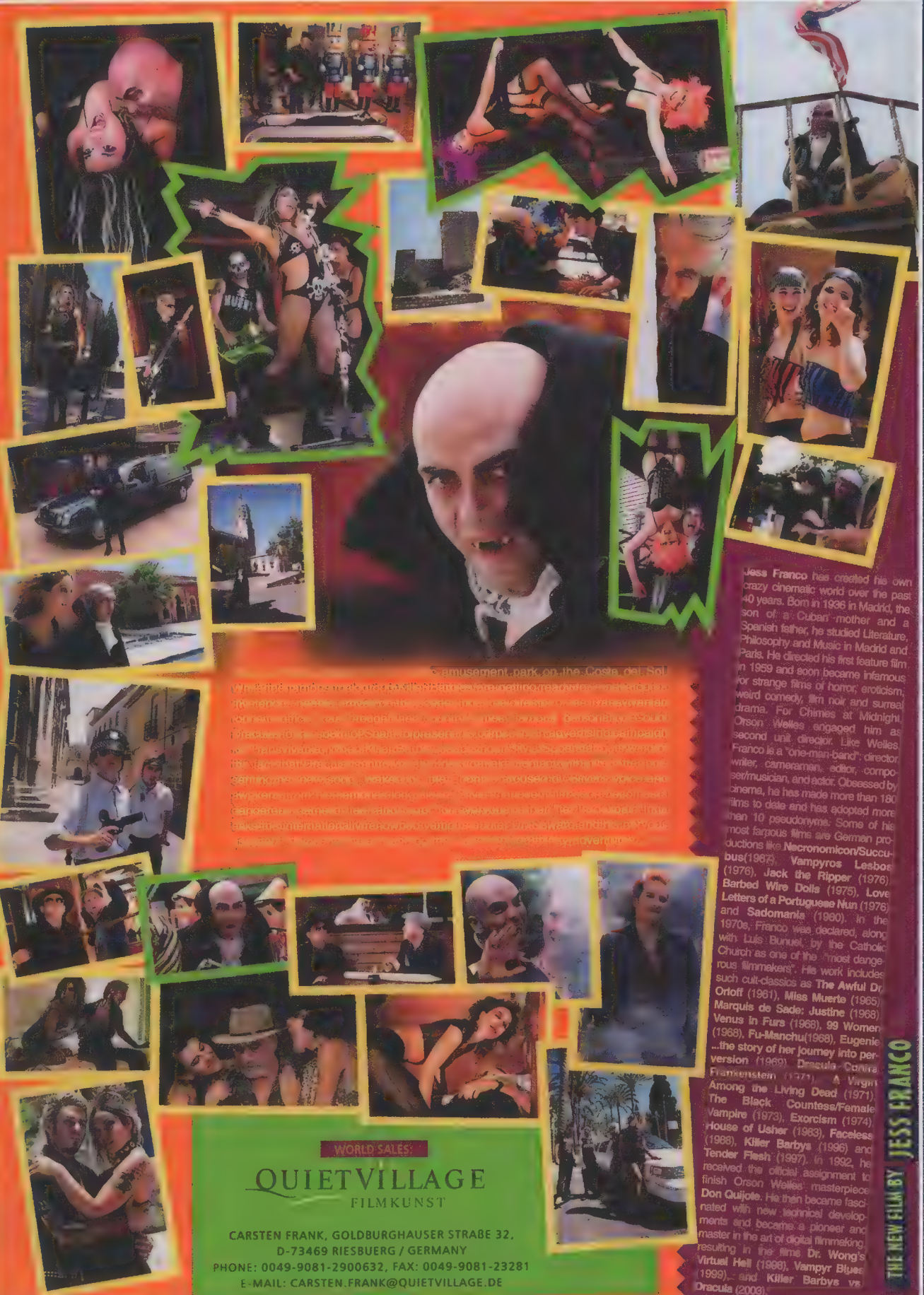
Lina Romay isn't much better, as an authoritarian administrator from the Transylvanian Ministry of Culture. Strutting around playing a comedy communist, and delivering her lines with a rolled letter 'r' in place of actual jokes, the normally reliable Romay

makes you wish that her wretched character, in fact this whole wretched film, would just go away. Poor old Aldo Sambrell dons a pirate's eyepatch and sings "*We are pirates from the Antilles and you are making me mad mad mad*," seemingly improvising for the sake of something to do. Paul Lapidus dresses like a Mexican gaucho for no apparent reason, although this does at least set up a scene in which he captures Dracula with his lariat. Franco scatters these 'vignettes' amid random shots of the cast mooching around the location, while poorly-conceived dialogue scenes bump randomly into each other without a hint of structure or pacing.

Worse than that, the already tenuous theme of 'failed illusion' is badly fumbled in the writing. "*Careful Doctor, careful!*" says Seward's assistant Albinus, as the two of them arrive in the amusement park. "*The floor is made of uneven wooden beams and is very dangerous to walk on.*" In fact, the floor they are walking on is completely flat. "*This is not a real village,*" says Dr. Seward, opening up the possibility of a humorous shell-game with illusion and reality: "*No, it's a fake one,*" says Albinus, bringing the joke crashing down to nothing. Contrast this scene with the one in *Vampire Function* in which Exequiel Caldas fires an empty gun at a vampire while making fake bullet sounds, only to stare in disbelief at the weapon when the vampire doesn't die. There is no such surreal wit in *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula*. If Pietro Martellanza's fake Dracula had beaten the 'real' one, perhaps this mess might have coalesced into something more interesting...

As for the musical phenomenon at the centre of it all, where to begin? Making one film about The Killer Barbies might be considered an accident; making two is unforgivable. *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula* sees the band hitting the big time, complete with feverish media interest (one journalist) and a hen-party stretch limo to ferry them from one side of the Tivoli amusement park to the other. "*The Count may not be photographed, especially with third rate musicians who can't play in tune,*" snaps Irina, when the group suggest a photo-opportunity with Dracula's coffin. Irina's got it all wrong though: the Killer Barbies are always boringly in tune. Every guitar lick is proficient and professional, every drumbeat neat and tidy: they're about as punk rock as a garden topiary. If they played out of tune they might at least generate some friction: instead, roughness has been carefully polished away, leaving a surface of such bland mediocrity it's a wonder they didn't audition for *The X-Factor*. "*You know, what you're playing is really fucking crappy,*" says a boorish Killer Barbies fan to a vagrant strumming a ukelele on the pavement. "*I should stick that guitar up his arse!*" says another. Personally, I know who I'd rather listen to.

We finally hit rock bottom when the band meet the vampire. Has Jess Franco ever filmed anything quite so embarrassing as the scene where Dracula gets up on stage and dances with the Killer Barbies? There's also a shot of Dracula 'digging' their crazy sound from the side of the stage, which may well be the stupidest five seconds in Franco's whole career. It's just for lols though, right? Well, it helps if the jokes are funny. "*Are you the real Count Dracula? Have you ever had any problems with AIDS?*" asks lovely



Amusement park on the Costa del Sol

Whispering shadows walk on a dark, deserted street, ready to attack. In the background, a large, ornate building with a clock tower stands prominently. The scene is set in a dark, atmospheric environment, typical of Franco's gothic horror style.

Jess Franco has created his own crazy cinematic world over the past 40 years. Born in 1936 in Madrid, the son of a Cuban mother and a Spanish father, he studied Literature, Philosophy and Music in Madrid and Paris. He directed his first feature film in 1969 and soon became infamous for strange films of horror, eroticism, weird comedy, film noir and surreal drama. For Chimes at Midnight, Orson Welles engaged him as second unit director. Like Welles, Franco is a "one-man-band": director, writer, cameraman, editor, composer/musician, and actor. Obsessed by cinema, he has made more than 180 films to date and has adopted more than 10 pseudonyms. Some of his most famous films are German productions like Necronomicon/Succubus (1967), Vampyros Lesbos (1976), Jack the Ripper (1976), Barbed Wire Dolls (1975), Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun (1976) and Sadomania (1980). In the 1970s, Franco was declared, along with Luis Buñuel, by the Catholic Church as one of the "most dangerous filmmakers". His work includes such cult-classics as The Awful Dr. Orloff (1961), Miss Muerte (1965), Marquis de Sade: Justine (1968), Venus in Furs (1968), 99 Women (1968), Fu-Manchu (1968), Eugenie... the story of her journey into perversion (1969), Dracula - Contra Frankenstein (1971), A Virgin Among the Living Dead (1971), The Black Countess/Female Vampire (1973), Exorcism (1974), House of Usher (1963), Faceless (1968), Killer Barbys (1966) and Tender Flesh (1997). In 1992, he received the official assignment to finish Orson Welles' masterpiece Don Quixote. He then became fascinated with new technical developments and became a pioneer and master in the art of digital filmmaking, resulting in the films Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell (1998), Vampyr Blues (1999), and Killer Barbys vs. Dracula (2009).

THE NEW FILM BY JESS FRANCO

WORLD SALES: QUIETVILLAGE FILMKUNST

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Katja Bienert, playing a journalist who spots the vampire hanging around the amusement park. But Dracula doesn't reply, he just flaps his cape and snarls. That's the level of hilarity at which the script operates. It's not enough just to mention AIDS if you're going for 'outrageous comedy': you need a punchline too! When Dracula expresses lustful interest in the Killer Barbies' singer, pin-up and chief selling point Silvia Superstar, his 'cultural secretary' Irina says "*If you behave, I'll give you a horny video of this capitalist minx as a present.*" The suggestion is that Dracula is some kind of Romanian communist who regards the Killer Barbies as decadent Western whores; but surely Count Dracula is 'old money', and certainly not a socialist? The film is full of silly remarks like this, shallow jokes which have not been thought through. If the theme of the film is 'failed illusions' then Franco is taking a mighty risk by peppering the script with failed gags. You can shove your ironic tongue in your cheek as much as you like, but it still won't redeem a rotten joke. That's the trouble with comedy – it's the only genre where 'so bad it's good' doesn't work.

Cast and crew: The making-of documentary by Carsten Frank is better than the feature – in fact *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula* would be massively improved if the documentary were spliced into the film itself. It has some great footage of Pietro Martellanza, who arrives on location with long greying hair, clad head to toe in denim. He looks like a vacationing rock star, or Frank Silva's 'Bob' in *Twin Peaks*. Franco looks genuinely happy to see him: the two of them had last worked together on the 1969 historical horror film *The Bloody Judge* ... Although the press release circulated for the film announces that it was made in 35mm, the documentary clearly shows, as if you couldn't tell, that Franco shot it on video, using a Sony video camera.

Locations: TivoliWorld and the Castillo de Bil-Bil in Benalmádena, with further shooting at the Castillo de Santa Catalina, Jaen, last seen in *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*.

Timeline

shooting	August	2002
DVD premiere (Germany)	05 September	2005

Running time

GER 'X-Rated Kult' DVD	97m51s
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director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**, based on "The Song of Songs" from the Old Testament. executive producer: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. music: **Jess Franco**, **Daniel J. White**. additional music: **Cristal Andino**. director of photography: **Viktor Seastrom** [as 'Peter Södeström'] [actually **Jess Franco**]. 1st assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Almirall]. 2nd assistant director: **José Roberto Villa**. production manager: **Bill Mendoza**. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as 'Al Gutierrez']. editor: **Peter Södeström**. digital effects: **John Wood**. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. electrician: **M. Kafer**, **Rendeuelez**. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'R. Schargorodsky']. make-up: **Javier Díez**. technical supplies: **Manacoa Films**. laboratories: **U.M.T. Singen**. digital sound: **Sound to Vision** (Málaga). produced by **Manacoa Films**. *Uncredited*: executive co-producer: **Carsten Frank**. lighting and camera assistant: **Emilio Schargorodsky**.

Cast: **Fata Morgana King** (alien girl #1). **Carmen Montes** (alien girl #2). **Raquel Cabra** [as 'Rachel Sheppard'] (the voyeur). **Lina Romay** (the voyeur's ex girlfriend).

Synopsis: *A lesbian couple who enjoy an active sex life in their modern high-rise apartment become aware that another woman is watching them through binoculars from an adjacent block. This lonely voyeur is seriously depressed: her own girlfriend has left her to go back to her husband. One day, while making love, the two women hear a scream and look out of the window. Many floors below lies the broken body of their neighbour. Driven to despair by the spectacle of unattainable happiness, she has committed suicide by jumping from her window. One of the women says to her partner, "I will never understand the humans". They go back to bed and continue their lovemaking.*

Production notes: Two weeks after completing *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula*, Franco dusted off his old production company, Manacoa Films, and with some additional financial input from Carsten Frank's Quiet Village Filmkunst, set about producing two very low-budget sex films, to be shot back-to-back on videotape. The onscreen credits declared that Emilio Schargorodsky was now executive producer on the film (and its back-to-back companion piece, *Flores de perversion*). Bearing in mind Schargorodsky's clarification about erroneous credits on the One Shot films, I asked him about this sudden escalation of his role: "*For these films, my relationship to Jess was even closer, although my work was the same; helping with the lights, helping with the camera, being the production manager. It was a kind of friendly gesture of Jess's to put me in the credits like that.*"¹

LAS FLORES DE LA PASIÓN

Spain, 2002

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Alternative titles

Passion (GER DVD cover)

Jess Franco's Passion (DVD English-language sale title)

Production company

Manacoa Films

Quiet Village Filmkunst

Review: Nothing of any interest occurs in this pleasingly lit but terminally bland soft porn video. The synopsis above tells you everything you need to know about the 'story', so which carnal delights does Franco explore in the ninety-eight minute running time? Cunnilingus, mainly. Lots and lots of very tame cunnilingus, in which the labia are kissed and nuzzled but never parted or penetrated: not by fingers, not by dildos nor by any other protuberance. If you were an alien watching this DVD to learn about human anatomy, you'd conclude that Earth women have clefts between their legs approximately five inches long and half a centimetre deep, which when fondled or tickled exude mild pleasure and a compulsion to loll around all day. Aesthetically speaking, the gleaming modern interiors and chic colour design are worth mentioning, but when you take them away what's left is neither formally nor narratively involving enough to hold your attention. (Although, to be fair, dedicated fans of very very slow lesbian softcore may feel differently...)

The revelation in the last five minutes that the lesbian couple are not of this Earth adds nothing to what we've seen. The only character to register at all is the nameless voyeur's equally nameless girlfriend, played by Lina Romay. In a handful of close-ups, speaking on the telephone, Romay gives more to the screen in four or five minutes than the other cast members manage in ninety. She has a very hackneyed role to play, but she delivers a genuine performance. Plausible emotion flits across her features, making her instantly more appealing than the nominal stars of the show. *Vampire Blues* star Raquel Cabra (aka Rachel Sheppard) is a good choice for the depressed voyeur, and she deserves more to do, but despite her interesting face and convincing air of suppressed misery she doesn't have enough to work with here. As for the two sexy lesbians and their endless stultifying caresses, they seem to me no more sexy or passionate (remember the title?) than the bare minimum required to avoid seeming cold and weird. Which frankly would have been preferable. In an ideal world, Jess Franco would not have needed to put this out. He would have been working on his proposed Orloff sequel, and could have left this piece of fluff in his personal archive. Instead, *Las flores de la pasión* takes an unearned place on the same filmography as *Al otro lado del espejo*, *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, *Venus in Furs* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, films which I feel like watching right now, to remind myself why I'm writing this book.

Music: The highlight of the film is the return of a sly, slippery tune by Daniel White which we've not heard since *Je brûle de partout* in 1978. The jaunty credits theme from *Sadomania* pops up too. As for the additional music by Cristal Andino, it's either forgettable synthetic ambience or actively irritating pop music, perhaps Brazilian to echo the vaginal shaving scenes in the film.

Locations: Filmed in Málaga.

Connections: This is a lesbian version of Franco's 1985 hardcore film *El mirón y la exhibicionista* ... The concept of sex-mad aliens was explored by Franco with infinitely more wit and weirdness in *Shining Sex* (1975) and *El sexo está loco* (1980).

FLORES DE PERVERSIÓN

Spain, 2002

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Alternative titles

Perversion (GER DVD cover)

Jess Franco's Perversion (DVD English-language sale title)

Production company

Manaco Films

Quiet Village Filmkunst

Timeline

shooting	August	2002
DVD premiere (Germany)	5 September	2005

Running time

GER 'X-Rated Kult' DVD	93m
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director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**, based on "The Stratagem of Love" by the **Marquis De Sade**. executive producer: **Emilio Schargorodsky**. music: **Jess Franco**. additional music: **Exequiel Cohen**. 'director of photography': **Viktor Seastrom** [as 'Peter Södeström']. 1st assistant director: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Almirall]. 2nd assistant director: **José Roberto Vila**. production manager: **Antonio De Padua**. camera assistant: **Alfredo Gutiérrez** [as 'Al Gutierrez']. editor: **Viktor Seastrom** [as 'Peter Södeström']. digital effects: **John Wood**. art director: **Cyrus Kalman**. electrician: **Mario Kafer** [as 'M. Kafer'], **Aitor Rendeuelez** [as 'Rendeuelez']. stills: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [as 'R. Schargorodsky']. make-up: **Javier Díez**. technical supplies: **Manaco Films**. laboratories: **U.M.T. Singen**. digital sound: **Sound to Vision** (Málaga). produced by **Manaco Films**. *Uncredited:* executive co-producer: **Carsten Frank**. actual director of photography: **Jess Franco**.

Cast: **Fata Morgana King** (Marga). **Carmen Montes** (Lola). **Eva Neumann**. **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'Exequiel Cohen'] (Antonio). **Raquel Cabra** [as 'Rachel Sheppard'] (Anna). **Martin Gardfield** (Carlos, the second male victim). **Lina Romay** (Madame Augustina Villeblanche).

Synopsis: *Madame Augustina Villeblanche is a radical lesbian who runs an S&M call-girl agency. She despises men, and tutors her girls in the same philosophy; the Marquis De Sade mixed with Valerie Solanas. One day she receives a call from the head of a crime syndicate involved in prostitution. He tells Augustina that he's sending two new girls for her to check out, called Marga and Lola: "They are exhibitionists. Two lesbians. Ready for anything." Augustina is impressed with them, and puts them to work. Their first assignment is to sexually torture a man*

called Antonio, who has angered Madame Villeblanche by attempting to seduce one of her best whores. She kidnaps Antonio and ties him up, then instructs Marga and Lola to torment him with a lesbian display which he can watch but not participate in. Having aroused him intolerably, Madame Villeblanche, who is observing from a nearby sofa, has the disloyal employee, Anna, brought in. "Get the men out of your head," she tells the girl, while fondling her. "Men are sons of bitches. We've got to stick together." Anna is then led away so as not to see what happens next: Antonio is toyed with by the two girls, then castrated. Anna is subjected to a vaginal shaving, but far from being forgiven she's simply being prepared for torture and death. Marta and Lola strap Anna to a X-frame and whip her, bite her and scratch her, with particular attention paid to the freshly shaved vagina. Finally, Madame Villeblanche joins in, chews at the exposed vagina, then produces a hook and plunges it into Anna's crotch, killing her. Next up is a second male victim, who is whipped and castrated. As the women snack on his blood, Marga looks to the camera and informs the audience that they will be next.

"Sex with men is mean and clumsy. They can't even control it. Girls! Learn how to treat men with contempt. Despise their big sex. Don't be afraid to pinch or to stab them, tear them apart whenever you feel like it. Make them understand that they are simply an instrument. And they will turn into cute little lap dogs, they'll turn into toys in your hands [...] And should any of you fall for one of these hairy stinking swines, she shall be punished with the same strength." – Madame Augustina Villeblanche in *Flores de perversion*.

Review: Just as Franco's sick and twisted *Phalo Crest* was an improvement on its bland twin *Phollastia*, so *Flores de perversion* is a livelier affair than *Las flores de la pasión*. It's a 'hard softcore' sex film about militant man-hating lesbians, with sadomasochism, pussy-shaving, castration, vaginal stabbing by metal hook, and cod-Sadean philosophy crossed with *The SCUM Manifesto*. "Regarding men, the representatives of the so-called stronger sex, learn to enjoy the pain you are causing them. Their agonised screams shall give you pleasure and orgasms. Only this way can you achieve the nirvana of lust," says Madame Augustina Villeblanche, in her role as ersatz Dolmance to a harem of Costa del Sol whores. The blood and torture blows away the cobwebs when it happens, and it's much more carnally 'switched on' than its twin production, but sadly this doesn't stop much of the film from becoming irksome and tedious. Everything just takes way too long. The linking material, with Fata Morgana and Carmen Montes telling their none-too-complicated story to camera, weighs very heavily on the running time; twenty-five minutes of footage (yes, I've timed every scene), for less than two minutes of voice-over. And that's not including five minutes of the same footage swamped in primary colours, used for the opening and closing credits! Thirty minutes, then, of two women clad in lingerie, looking at the camera and swaying from side to side, occasionally dancing together or turning to sway their bottoms too. The phrase 'money for old rope' springs to mind.

The first half of the film is mostly quite comic, as brothel madame Augustina Villeblanche (Lina Romay) and her favourite whore Anna (Raquel Cabra) roll around in lingerie having sex on a hotel bed, while a succession of daffy telephone calls (voiced by Jess Franco) interrupt them and spoil their fun. There are some amusing digs at male prowess: when Anna sees a collection of dildos in Augustina's bedroom, she says, "*The white one reminds me of Carlos*." "*Because of the size?*", Augustina asks. "*No, because it doesn't move*," says Anna. Another comedy highlight sees Marta and Lola castrate a man of average endowment, then gorge themselves on his severed member which has magically grown in the meantime to the size of a chunky rubber dildo. Meanwhile, a 'pussy-bumping' scene is given a little extra oomph by the addition of a cymbal crash whenever the two vaginas touch. Eccentric touches like these help to sustain one's attention through the dull patches.

Speaking of vaginas, the modern obsession with shaved pussies is in full flower here. When asked why her sex is shaved, Marga replies, "*Because of the crabs. We've got lots of them in our village*." Later, we hear that Madame Villeblanche has her own reasons for approving of genital depilation: "*The female sex organ is much too beautiful to hide it behind hair*." This leads to a long, and I do mean long, vaginal shaving scene for Cabra, with Montes and Morgana doing the honours. Eleven minutes later it turns into a six-minute cunnilingus scene, with the two women very delicately licking and stroking the newly shaved area (thoughtfully avoiding any further irritation). They could have concentrated on what lies beyond the labia, but since the film is a no-penetration zone, the freshly shaved surface is all that's left to play with. As with *Las flores de la pasión*, the net effect is to suggest a world in which vaginas don't open, or even part their lips. Penetration, even by another female, is off the menu, which may please the phallophobic Franco, and placate censors, but doesn't move the pleasures of Sapphism beyond first base. Even when Madame Villeblanche sanctions the torturing of bisexual turncoat Anna ("*Enjoy yourself, yes! But don't let her faint...*"), penetration is not among the torments inflicted upon her (nor upon her male lover). It seems that for Franco, in his misandrist later years, even the vaginal interior is verboten, perhaps because in its shape and depth it implies, among other things, the existence of the penis...

Franco's use of the camera is slapdash and confusing. Poor old Raquel Cabra is so unsure where to look that her eyes dart round in their sockets like pinballs. No wonder, given that Franco breaks the fourth wall so capriciously. It's fine when Marga and Lola look into the lens while a voice-over tells us their backstory; such scenes, though over-long, are the equivalent of a storyteller's asides. But when Marga and Flora shave Anna's vagina, all three women keep looking at the camera, evidently on Franco's instructions. So what's the role of the camera here? Perhaps Madame Villeblanche is filming what we see? No, we never see her holding a camera. During the torture of Anna we hear Romay shout "*Stop it girls! Very good*" – upon which the torturers look at the camera. This suggests that the camera's point of view is Madame Villeblanche's.

Yet no sooner has this possibility arisen than Romay steps into shot, from the side, puncturing the POV and bouncing us back to the feeling that there's no plan, no discrimination, no coherent method for the camera. This chaotic approach to the fourth wall is like an involuntary twitch, on the part of a director growing less and less enamoured of world-building and more and more content to offer the viewer just the brute fact of video-film production.

The final scene, depicting the prolonged torture and humiliation of a bound man by Marga and Lola, takes the kind of female domination fantasy briefly dipped into in earlier films such as *The Hot Nights of Linda* (Pierre Taylou being flogged by Alice Arno) or *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* (José Llamas being whipped by Lina Romay), and stretches it out to a duration more suited to pornographic enjoyment. "What's your problem, tough guy? You are screaming like a mouse, you faggot. We're going to cut off your balls!" says Marga. However, the impression of an unstoppable femme castratrice would be a tad more believable if the actress didn't keep nervously looking behind the camera, probably at Franco yelling instructions. It's also a shame that Martin Gardfield, the victim, opts for comedy when the moment of castration arrives, crossing his eyes like a cartoon character who's caught his testicles in his zipper. He deserves an extra lashing just for that. "And you, you are going to be next!" says Morgana, leering at the camera, her face smeared with blood from the victim's severed penis, confirming that the customer for all this militant lesbian imagery is, surprise surprise, the masochistic male. How much better to have ended with a Sadean rallying call to the women in the audience!

Cast and crew: Let's hear it once more for Lina Romay, sultry sexual performer and lascivious screen icon for thirty years. *Flores de perversión* is her last sexual role in a Jess Franco film; from here on she plays only non-sexual roles.

Music: Alain Petit's immortal "La vie est une merde" provides the main musical ballast. Elsewhere, "Oceano Nox", previously used for the credit sequence of *Sangre en mis zapatos*, works its sleazy but sorrowful magic. It can be found on the 1984 library music album *Mood Selection Ambiance Volume 1*.

Locations: Málaga.

Connections: The credits profess a basis in De Sade's short story "Augustine de Villeblanche, ou le Stratagème de l'amour", a claim which is absolute bunkum. Sade's story is a rapaciously twisting tale about a man who disguises himself as a woman in order to woo a lesbian! ... Fata Morgana in a curly blonde wig links back to Pamela Stanford, wild-girl star of *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* and *Lorna... the Exorcist* ... For a scene involving Fata Morgana and Carmen Montes dancing together, Franco reprises a favourite camera angle from *Ópalo de fuego* and *Pick-Up Girls*, peering up from floor level between the actresses as they perform a slow dance and rub their breasts together ... The scene in which a naked man is whipped by two women, while suspended by the wrists from a curtain rail, recalls a similar scene involving Pierre Taylou in *Les Croqueuses* (the hardcore version of *Countess Perverse*) ... The sex scene ruined by constant telephone calls is probably a nod to Luis

Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* ... Militant man-hating lesbians out to rid the world of the so-called 'stronger sex' is a motif that Franco has been toying with since 1967's *Kiss Me Monster* and 1968's *The Girl from Rio*...

SNAKEWOMAN

USA, 2005

© One Shot Productions 2005

Alternative titles

Vampire Interlude (pre-shooting title)

Production company

One Shot Productions (USA)

Timeline

shooting	15 April-12 May	2005
Festival screening*	07 October	2005
DVD premiere	28 March	2006

*Imago International Young Film & Video Festival

Running time

US 'Sub Rosa' DVD 97m41s

director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**, **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Ma. Almirall]. executive producer: **Kevin Collins**. producers: **Peter Evanko**, **Casey Yip**. director of photography: **Emilio Schargorodsky** [actually **Jess Franco**]. camera operator: **Emilio Schargorodsky**. music: **David Ramos**, **Exequiel Caldas**, **Jess Franco**. assistant directors: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Almirall], **Fata Morgana** [as 'Puri Luque']. production manager: **Bill Mendoza**. assistant camera: **Alfredo Gutiérrez**. editor: **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'E. Caldas']. head of post-production: **Kevin Collins**. post-production: **Tiffany Sinclair**. art director: **Ignasi Roig**. electricians: **Mario Kafer**, **Aitor Renduelez** [as 'Pipo Renduelez Jr.']. make-up: **Ana Madrid**. special make-up: **Ramone**. cameras and technical equipment: **Manacoa Film**, **Optica Zeiss**. Filmed in High Definition, and digital stereophonic sound. Grateful thanks to El Señorío de Lepanto, Hotel Principito. *Uncredited*: US post-production (titles and opticals): **carSINogenic candy**.

Cast: **Carmen Montes** (Oriana Balasz). **Fata Morgana** (Carla). **Christie Levin** (Alpha). **Exequiel Caldas** [as 'Ezekiel Cohen'] (Tony Garko). **Lina Romay** (Dr. Van Helsing). **Antonio Mayans** (Nostradamus). **Luco Amadori III** (Old Andros). **Fabio Batistuta** (Cabezón). **Nat. W. Adzibor** (Andros).

Synopsis: *A prominent Spanish publishing house sends Carla, a talented young employee, to visit the family of Oriana Balasz, a once controversial but now almost forgotten artist from the 1930s. Oriana is described as a singer and composer of Hungarian origin who was born at the end of the 19th century. A great beauty as well as an artist, she enjoyed a rapturous film career in the 1920s and was reputed to have wooed several Nazi generals during the rise of the Third Reich. She also became notorious at the time for openly flaunting her love affairs with women, including, so it was said, Greta Garbo. Although efforts have been made in the past, no one so far has managed to persuade Oriana's descendants to allow any further publication or release of her work... Arriving at the property where the family are supposed to live, Carla finds it deserted and partly derelict. When she phones her boss, Tony Garko, to tell him, he insists that she must have been mistaken and urges her to go back and check again. On her second attempt Carla finds a way in, and books into a hotel. During the evening she meets a young man who introduces himself as Andros Balasz, father of Oriana. Yet he appears to be no older than thirty. He invites her to join him for breakfast. Meanwhile, at a nearby sanatorium that may be part of the hotel, Doctor Nostradamus, who dresses like a friar, is treating a woman called Alpha. She is suffering from convulsions which are brought on by her psychic link with Oriana. The next morning, Carla has breakfast – not with Andros Balasz, as arranged, but with Nostradamus. He tells her that the Balasz residence is haunted by “beings who inhabit the place without actually living there... it's like they're real and they're not real.” Back in her room, Carla finds Oriana Balasz reclining nude on the bed. She raises the possibility of acquiring the rights to her work. After spending some time with the Balasz family, Carla leaves. She goes to Ms. Van Helsing, her doctor, confused about the sequence of events. Van Helsing tells her that she has been picked up by police wandering in the countryside, dazed and confused. She recommends that Carla should take time out from work to recover at a secluded health resort. While she's there, Tony calls to congratulate her on acquiring the rights to Oriana's work. It seems that Carla's lesbian lovemaking has unlocked doors that previous entreaties could not. Tony invites Carla to the office to view the newly arrived material. Arriving with her doctor, Carla enters the screening room with Tony. The three of them start to view the material. After a while, Tony says he's seen the footage already and leaves. Van Helsing says she's seen enough, and leaves too. Carla continues to watch the film alone. In it, Oriana fellates a man and then bites his penis, sucking blood from it. As Carla watches, Oriana turns to the camera and calls her name. Carla steps into the world of the film, finding herself back at the Balasz residence. She and Oriana embrace as lovers...*

Production notes: Between 2001 and 2005, Franco had in mind a slate of ambitious projects. They included another stab at the Edgar Wallace novel *The Case of the Frightened Lady*, which he'd already filmed in 1983 as *Voces de muerte* (but which had disappeared unreleased, along with many more films shot for Golden Films in the mid-1980s.) The new version was to have starred Linnea Quigley, Sydne Rome and Brigitte Lahaie. Then there was “Ballad for a Dead Harlot” (which would have starred *Incubus* femme

fatale Carina Palmer), “Erratica” (about which little is known) and “Cries in the Night – Orloff 2001”, a revamp of his 1961 horror classic *The Awful Dr. Orloff*. The latter had been mooted as a possible One Shot production before Franco was forced to look elsewhere. Producer Kevin Collins told *Cinefania*, “That movie is no longer in the hands of One Shot. We helped a little with the script at one point, but it needed a bigger budget and exceeded our possibilities. It has a futuristic plot with a lot of exterior shooting, it would have required us to film in several countries or to construct sets that suggest different countries and different eras. Jess took the project to another company. We would have been happy to continue with *Cries in the Night* but it was better for Jess to have a company that could afford the budget he envisioned.”¹

In his search for better financing, Franco turned to his old collaborators Eurociné, for the first time since falling out with them in 1990 over the dubbing of *Fall of the Eagles* and the rights to *Downtown Heat*. As he explained to the website ‘La Abadía de Berzano’ in 2002, “[Marius] Leseour has never been generous, but he is a businessman and knows when there is money to be earned behind a project. So, he knows that he has to let go before he can work. His son [Daniel] is one of the heads of Sogepaq [a subsidiary of Video Mercury Films] and he is also very interested in the matter. Right now Daniel is in the United States finalizing details.”²

Franco also gave some idea of where the extra money would be going: “I'm very excited about it. Right now what is almost certain is Malcolm McDowell to do Orloff, Udo Kier for his enemy, and new music from Iron Maiden collaborating with me. Unlike the old one, don't you think?”³

Sadly, it seems that Daniel Leseour's trip to the USA failed to secure the necessary finance. His father Marius Leseour, long-time head of the company, died in May 2003, and afterwards Franco and Daniel Leseour made no further attempt to revive the Orloff ‘brand’. Instead, in the Spring of 2005, Franco turned his attentions to a project which he described as “Among the most sincere and creative films of my career”...⁴

Review: A curious and sometimes haunting experience, *Snakewoman* is a new riff on Franco's 1970 classic, *Vampyros Lesbos*. Instead of Linda Westinghouse (Ewa Strömberg) travelling to Turkey to discuss a real estate deal with a vampire Countess, we have Carla Berkovitch (Fata Morgana), sent by a publishing company into the Spanish countryside to seek out the notoriously reclusive family of Oriana Balasz, a mysterious Hungarian singer, composer and actress who is rumoured to have made explicit erotica long before such things were acceptable. The family hold the rights to Oriana's films and music, but despite numerous approaches from interested parties they have never agreed to re-release her work. Can Carla succeed where others have failed? Is Oriana really dead? And why does her supposed ‘daughter’ look exactly like her?

The notion of an actress from a family of vampires making porn films in the 1920s is very appealing, and could have done with more detailed exploration. But while it starves a few of its

good ideas, *Snakewoman* has enough going on to keep us engaged. Instead of indulging in the rampant silliness and larking around that made *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula* or *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula* so tiresome, Franco keeps a relatively straight face and summons some genuine creepiness. Partly this is down to the music, which hovers fretfully on the soundstage like a digital cloud of uncertain provenance, threatening a rainfall of toxicity. Defiantly experimental, and distinctly odd, the soundtrack even survives a venture into techno, thankfully without swapping the ominous mood for underground club-night ambience. In addition, a judicious selection from the Daniel White vaults brings a touch of old world class to the latter stages.

Mood was Franco's strongest suit in his cinematic work, but it's the most fragile and elusive component in his video productions. In many of them it's non-existent, banished by the video picture quality and/or squashed by terrible sound recording. *Snakewoman*, however, is one of his most successful attempts to recapture the unsettling atmosphere of his celluloid marvels. In his ongoing search for a way to make video look less flat and banal, Franco chooses this time to darken the image in many sequences, and while some may feel that the brightness is too low and the contrast is too high, I personally found the resulting shadowy imprecision fairly eerie and unsettling. If video is a medium of evidence, and shadows offer the chance to keep secrets, then *Snakewoman* achieves the difficult task of keeping secrets on video.

One secret the film keeps surpassingly well is the precise physical layout of its primary locations. When Carla first arrives and explores an apparently deserted building, we are led to believe that this was once the Balasz residence. When she's sent back to look again, she enters a sort of oneiric interzone, which depending on the scene in question is either a hotel, the Balasz homestead, or a sanatorium – although where one ends and another begins is impossible to say. In the film's already hazy storyline they seem to shift and blur into each other. In her hotel bathroom Carla is visited by the handsome Andros Balasz, a young black man who says "I'm in charge of things around here" and invites her to meet with the family. "I am at your service... even in your bathroom," he tells her, which in this context is not so much a come-on as an explanation of why he can walk into her hotel room without a key! "When you finish with your bath, come down to breakfast with Oriana and me," he says. But after two interruptions to this narrative thread (the introduction of Alpha and Dr. Nostradamus, and a sudden appearance by the 'Snakewoman') we cut to Carla having breakfast not with Andros, but with Nostradamus, who treats the hotel as an extension of his sanatorium, taking messages from his flunkies there and holding court with Carla. It's all very strange and genuinely dreamlike.

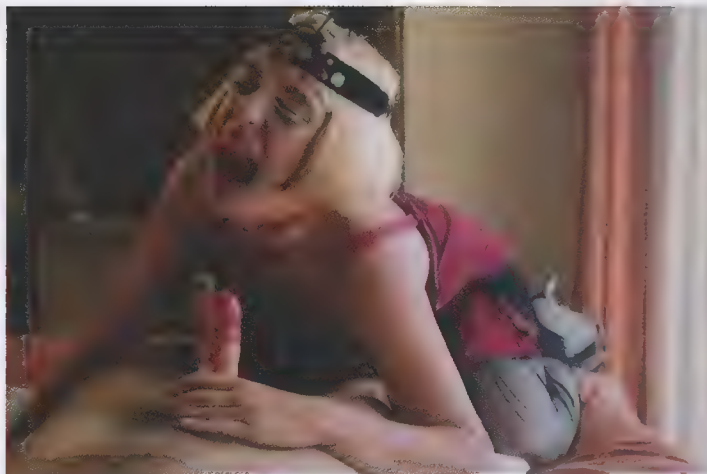
To add to the disorientation, Doctor Nostradamus wanders around dressed as a friar, and chants religiously motivated Latin rather than administer to his patient medically. Not only do doctors dress and act like monks, but if Carla's own doctor is anything to go by, they keep consultancy rooms in reference libraries. Instability

permeates everywhere, and yet the only genuine dream anyone has is when Carla dreams that she's back at her publisher's office, with her boss, watching a recently discovered clip of Oriana Balasz. Were it not for the scene being book-ended with shots of Carla asleep, you would think that this otherwise completely realistic sequence was an oasis of normality in a very odd movie! The content of the dream seems thoroughly normal, the only exception being the way Carla rattles off a potted biography of Oriana Balasz to the astonishment of her boss, which, if you have a very suspicious mind, might seem like wish-fulfilment. But this is typical of a film in which everything is being inverted and shifted around: when everything is so topsy-turvy, what else should a dream feel like but an average day at the office?

With the exception of one extended scene, which I'll discuss in a moment, the storyline of *Snakewoman* is reasonably busy, with four different levels of activity sketched in: Carla's search for Oriana and her meeting with the Balasz family; her boss's desire to release the Balasz back catalogue; Dr. Nostradamus's distinctly dodgy behaviour, involving the imprisonment of a deranged woman and the administering of unnecessary drugs; and Carla's sinister doctor, played by Lina Romay, who seems to have ulterior motives for helping. Not all of these strands play out as well as one might hope; the publisher's storyline peters out (I was hoping for a *Ring*-style curse on viewers of the illicit footage) and Lina's sinister intervention never leads to a satisfying climax. But this ramshackle collection of story strands does at least keep moving, and there's enough variation from scene to scene to make it interesting. The non-sequitur nature of much of the story is also authentically dreamlike, leading me to wonder if Franco perhaps kept a dream diary and then plowed it into his scripts.

The only downside to the action, for me at least, is the sexual cavorting of Oriana the 'Snakewoman' which takes up far too much screen time for my liking. It's all distinctly vanilla and uninspired. A sex scene between Oriana and Alpha, for instance, lasts sixteen minutes but comprises only four shots, during which the camera hardly moves except to zoom in a couple of times. What is it with Jess Franco and the tripod these days? When he was shooting in 35mm he was weaving and poking and prying with his camera, and yet with super-light video cameras he's as static as Andy Warhol. It's perverse without being especially interesting. Emilio Schargorodsky told me that Jess abandoned hand-held camera after *Snakewoman* because he developed Parkinson's Disease. Perhaps the beginnings of that condition were already making themselves felt?

Speaking of perversion, one thing that really grates here is the use of the term 'perverse' to describe Oriana and her 'shocking' films. If only Franco would deliver some genuine perversion! The film teases us about the nature of Oriana's work, and characters breathlessly discuss how ground-breaking and 'perverted' it was. But most of the time in the film we're watching two girls getting it on, which most rational modern viewers would decline to call perversion. To back up that loaded term we need stronger meat than some softcore female cuddling. There's precisely one scene



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Oriana Balasz (Carmen Montes) aka Snakewoman in three guises: #1, in a classic velvet cape; #2, as a 1920s 'flapper' with a yen for making silent movie porno snuff; and #3, a seductive siren and intransigent performing rights holder at a strange hotel ... Dr. Van Helsing (Lina Roday), Carla's agent, appears to be up to no good, but who knows? ... Oriana visits her psychic love slave, Alpha (Christie Levin).

that delivers a frisson of horror, involving a startlingly literal visualisation of a succubus draining male energy during sex, and even then it's compromised by almost ludicrously poor framing and staging. Let's just say that there are better ways to secure a prop penis to its supposed 'owner' than having the attacker hold it herself. Such problems pale into insignificance, however, compared to the persistent use of direct sound (possibly recorded by the camera itself) which sabotages the mood instead of helping it along. Sequences like the one in which Carla and Oriana make love, intercut with Dr. Nostradamus chanting religious gobbledegook in the garden, suffer from incredibly lazy sound mixing: Franco cuts back and forth between the two locations with no concern at all for the wildly different audio quality. Bad sound is one of the biggest stumbling blocks in Franco's video work, and it manages to pretty much ruin the vibe during this section of the film. The whole sequence should have been redubbed.

As the film draws to a close, it leaves a by-now-customary trail of loose ends and unexplained details. In fact the incidentals are among the best things about this film: a shot of Alpha walking through a field of sunflowers; the frequent cutaways to geese in flight whose cries are electronically treated; a strange scene in which we see Carla totally submerged in a hotel bath, her hair floating on the surface as the shower beats a rain-haze on the bathwater. One mystery I wouldn't mind being cleared up, though, is what snakes have to do with this story. Oriana has a massive one tattooed (alright, drawn) on her body – but snakes are never mentioned, there's no family mythology attaching her to snakes, and she doesn't get to slither on her belly or whip out a forked tongue, more's the pity. Instead we're left to assume that one day, long ago, she decided to get an enormous snake tattoo and was then stuck with it for all eternity. Let that be a warning to all you vampires: the undead must choose their tattoos wisely!

Cast and crew: "She's so beautiful that you'll forget that the images are bad, that the sound is terrible. You'll be absorbed with the beauty, personality and inspiration of Oriana Balasz." Thus the dialogue hails Franco's latest discovery, Carmen Montes. I hate to say it, but she's not the most compelling thing in this film, although given that she's in the title role she really needed to be. Much of the time she seems either awkward or slightly corny in her movements. Granted, it's hard to 'flap your vampire cloak' without bursting into giggles, or getting tangled up in the dratted thing: a couple of retakes might have helped. She's far better in her later appearances such as *Paula-Paula* and *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, where she conveys the required intensity and seems more comfortable on screen. Fata Morgana as Carla, and Christie Levin as Alpha, meanwhile, have more success with their roles. Morgana looks plausibly 'in the zone', giving a performance that would not be out of place in Franco's 1970s work, and Levin is actually quite alarming in the scene where she freaks out while being dragged to her cell for sedation.

Music: David Ramos and Exequiel Caldas add a touch of contemporary electronica to the film, and it actually works rather

well, especially during the ominous dark-sky opening of the film and the scenes of Carla exploring the deserted building. In addition there's a techno piece to accompany the Snakewoman's first appearance, followed by something mid-way between Public Image Ltd and Massive Attack. Both of these compositions add tension and excitement, even if the imagery lags behind (for instance, why Franco chose to introduce his vampire heroine against the backdrop of a thoroughly banal frosted-glass door I haven't a clue). There's a creativity and daring here that makes one wish Franco had gone further along this road (Ramos's music was released on CD by the Spanish label Vial Of Delicatessens in 2016, as *Snakewoman Soundtrack and other Delirium Music Inspired by Jess Franco Films*) ... Elsewhere we hear numerous (uncredited) Daniel White compositions: "Basse profonde" from the library LP *Mystère Bleuté* (1976), "Offertoire N°2" from the LP *Grandes Orgues De Notre Temps* (1976), "Monologue Pour Saxo Ténor" from the LP *Monologue Pour...* (1972), "Salza Infernale" and "Relax In Blue", both of which turned up on the compilation CD *Ambianza Acoustica* (2008), plus the rinky-dink theme from *El hotel de los ligues*, a relaxing piano rendition of the theme from *Kiss Me Killer*, and a delicately sad and strange piece for Spanish guitar heard in *Gemidos de placer*.

Locations: Filmed in and around Málaga.

Connections: The roots of *Snakewoman* lead all the way back to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which Franco had adapted in 1969 and then borrowed from many times later, for films such as *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1972) and *Dracula's Daughter* (1973). The closest similarity, however, is to *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970), Franco's first modern-day update of *Dracula*, with its seductive female vampire and a young woman in the 'Jonathan Harker' role. *Snakewoman* also adds a few choice giblets from *Lorna... the Exorcist* (Christie Levin echoes Catherine Lafférière in that film) and *Les Avauleses*, the porno version of his 1973 classic *Female Vampire* (the vampire nibbling a penis to suck blood and sperm). One is also reminded of Ken Russell's *Lair of the White Worm* (1988), which coincidentally used video footage too, albeit transferred to 35mm ... Among the male staff at the hotel where Carla stays is a fellow called 'Morpo' (a reference to Morpho, the terrifying sightless servant in *The Awful Dr. Orloff*) and a man called Andros (linking back to the character played by Hugo Blanco in *Dr. Orloff's Monster*). In both cases there's no appreciable thematic link to the earlier films, the names appearing simply for the pleasure of familiarity. Likewise Alpha, whose name takes us back to *Shining Sex* (1975), bears no relationship to the dimension-hopping alien sex fiend in that film; instead she plays a kind of Renfield to Montes' *Dracula* ... A couple of lines of dialogue suggest that Oriana was a lover of Greta Garbo, but the signed photograph we see on her mantelpiece depicts Marlene Dietrich ... Speaking about her plans for Oriana's back catalogue, Carla says, "We'd present her as an artist who was non-conformist, audacious, shameless... and snubbed and suffocated by the system." The description suggests a degree of identification with the heroine on Franco's part!

LA CRIPTA DE LAS MUJERES MALDITAS

Spain, 2007/8

© 2007

Original title in country of origin

La cripta de las mujeres malditas (SP) 'The crypt of cursed women'

Alternative titles

La crypte des femmes maudites (FR film programme title)

A Bad Day at the Cemetery (alt. English-language title)

La cripta de las condenadas (2012 DVD release)

Crypt of the Condemned

La cripta de las condenadas II (2012 DVD release)

Production company

Manacoa Films (Spain)

Production company (La cripta de las condenadas I & 2)

Manacoa Films (Spain)

Pellicules et essai (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date 2007/08

Paris Cinemateque 26 July 2008

(as *La cripta de las mujeres malditas*)

Sitges Film Festival 05 October 2012

(as *La cripta de las condenadas*)

Sitges Film Festival 07 October 2012

(as *La cripta de las condenadas II*)

Breda, Netherlands (BUT Film Festival) 08 June 2013

(as *La cripta de las condenadas*)

Breda, Netherlands (BUT Film Festival) 09 June 2013

(as *La cripta de las condenadas II*)

SP DVD release 2014

(*La cripta de las condenadas I & II*)

Running time

Original cut 150m

La cripta de las condenadas 72m

La cripta de las condenadas II 76m41s

director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**, **Fata Morgana**.

producer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Jess Franco**.

1st camera operator: **Fata Morgana**. music: **Ludo**, **Antoine y**

Thomas. additional music: **David Ramos**, **Daniel J. White**.

editor: **Jess Franco**. digital editor: **Fata Morgana**. sound: **Fata**

Morgana [as 'Puri Luque']. art director: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa

Almirall]. make-up: **Lina Romay** [as 'Candy Coster']. production

manager: **Lola Falana**. assistant directors: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa

Almirall], **Fata Morgana** [as 'Puri Luque']. second unit director: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Almirall]. camera assistant: **Sonia Colbert**. sound editor: **Fata Morgana**, **Xabier Ciruca**. sound mixer: **Santi Cerni**. sound effects editor: **Fata Morgana** [as 'Puri Luque']. cameras and technical material: **Manacoa Films**. Optical: **Zeiss**.

Additional credits for re-release as *La cripta de las condenadas*:

producer: **Ferran Herranz**. executive producer: **Álvaro Yunta**. music: **Maurice Ravel** – "Daphnis et Chloé, Concerto pour la main gauche; **Paul Hindemith** – "Mathis der Maler"; **Stan Kenton** – "Artistry in Rhythm". Additional music: **Ludo**, **Antoine and Thomas**, **Daniel J. White**, **David Ramos**.

Additional credits for re-release as *La cripta de las condenadas II*:

producer: **Ferran Herranz**. executive producer: **Álvaro Yunta**. music: **Paul Hindemith** – "Mathis der Maler"; **Johann Sebastian Bach**: Passacaglia in C Minor (BWV582, transcription de Respighi); Ottorino Respighi – "La fontane di Roma"; Béla Bartók – "Music for Strings. Percussion and Celeste"; **Maurice Ravel** – "Pavane pour une infante défunte"; **Stan Kenton** – "Artistry in Rhythm"; **Will Donaldson** – "Doo Wacka Doo". Additional music: **Ludo**, **Antoine and Thomas**, **Daniel J. White**, **David Ramos**.

Cast: **Fata Morgana** (Fata Morgana, Queen of the Night). **Carmen Montes** (woman with dark shoulder-length hair). **Eva Neumann** [as 'Eva Palmer'] (curly-haired woman). **Olivia Deveraux** (blonde woman in red stockings). **Marta Simoes** (woman with short dark hair). *Uncredited*: **María Traven** (woman in b/w footage wearing tiger-skin top).

Synopsis: *Four women writhe in ecstasy in purgatory. Occasionally they watch two more women having softcore sex on TV in black and white, and respond lasciviously to the attentions of a video camera operator who is filming them. This goes on for a hundred years. All the time God observes their actions to decide what will become of them. Since they fail to show any kind of remorse for their sinful ways, he zaps the ringleader, Fata Morgana, with his magical power, as dispensed by a stone angel in a graveyard.*

Production notes: Shot over several weeks in 2007 and 2008, this mammoth 150-minute video production was screened in two parts at the Cinémathèque Française on the 26th July 2008. No one showed an interest in releasing it until 2012, when producer Ferran Herranz, fresh from handling Franco's return to narrative filmmaking *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* (2012), put it out on two DVDs as *La cripta de las condenadas* and *La cripta de las condenadas II*.

Review: Being a Franco completist comes with a price – and now it's time to pay. *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* is a hundred and fifty minutes of utter drivel, lacking the slightest element of excitement,

fascination or even mild amusement. If you can think of something you'd rather look at for two and a half hours besides a handful of actresses wriggling on the floor in slow motion – clouds rolling by, for instance – then spare yourself this abyss of mediocrity and look elsewhere. Watching it, one is made irresistibly aware that there's more to life than movies.

The title of the film and a few fleeting fragments of voice-over ask us to interpret what we're seeing as some kind of purgatorial arena, in which licentious females have been corralled, presumably by a judgemental God. But since this 'crypt of cursed women' consists of nothing more than a few mirrors propped up against the furniture of Jess Franco's living room, and given that the 'cursed' show no sign that they're involved in anything more metaphysical than lolling around having lazy softcore sex on a sunny day, I think we can be forgiven for doubting the sincerity of the concept. *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* opens with a female voice-over (delivered by Lina Roday, although she doesn't appear), offering the following explanation for what we're about to see: "*I hear strange voices around me. They belong to the slaughtered virgins dismembered by the Eye of Evil, the perfidious Oberon of Darkness. But the Queen of the Night, our sacrosanct sinner, saved us from our sexual genocide and set us free forever. We dedicate our desires to her, we dedicate our longings, and offer our bodies without reservation. Bless you, tremulous throbbing flesh! Open to our most hidden desires. You are our Queen, oh great Fata Morgana.*" The suggestion seems to be that life after death under the rule of lesbian queen Fata Morgana is a pleasurable existence. However, as the second half of this epic begins, a screen caption declares: "*A hundred years later, the peace of the cemetery remained unperturbed and the women there condemned continued their shameless existence, always under the power of Fata Morgana.*" The words 'condemned' and 'shameless' suggest a Catholic context, despite what the female voice-over said earlier. So which is it to be? Are these 'slaughtered virgins' getting some fun at last, in an afterlife ruled by a sexy lesbian? Or is God in charge, condemning these ladies to sexual purgatory under a demon called Fata Morgana? The two statements are incompatible, but it doesn't really seem to matter either way. Being 'condemned' to a hundred years of slow motion sex appears not to have fazed these women, since they cheerily continue nuzzling each other's vaginas, massaging their butt-cheeks, or smirking seductively into the camera like telephone sex advertisers on late night TV. Meanwhile, in post-production, Jess Franco fannies around with the picture quality, either turning up the colour settings or fiddling with the light levels: a close-up of Fata Morgana stroking her shaved slit has the exposure cranked up so high that I wondered if she was meant to be masturbating through a nuclear blast, which would at least have given things some pep.

Deprived of story, characterisation, wit, surprise, atmosphere, visual inventiveness, or evidence of any formal clarity on the director's part, the mind is forced to wander for sustenance. Let's consider, then, Jess Franco's perennial desire to slow things down. In the 1970s, working with 35mm or 16mm film, slow motion was

an expensive indulgence, gobbling up twice the normal amount of film stock per minute. Nevertheless, in search of a way to elude the dictates of time, Franco came up with his own creative solutions: actors would move languorously, the camera would slowly pan across their bodies in tight close-up, the zoom lens would seek strange details within momentary clinches, and in the edit he would assemble these shots into mesmeric montages, teasing glimpses of infinity from the fabric of the quotidian. Franco became adept at manipulating the viewer's sense of time, rapturously and obsessively weaving image and music into eerie ritualistic encounters... Then, along comes digital technology, and there's a drop-down menu offering slow motion in a range of tempting flavours: half-speed; quarter-speed; eighth-speed; sixteenth-speed. A click of the mouse and there you have it. Now your *whole film* can run in slow motion! Point and click; instant gratification. No extra cost, no sweat and strain, no ticking clock in the editing studio! Say goodbye, though, to inventiveness and discrimination. Instead of asking how best to achieve the goal of suspended time using the techniques of cinema, Franco is like a child in a behavioural experiment, heading straight for the food dispenser offering sugary treats and keeping his finger jammed on the button. All of the experience gathered in forty years of filmmaking is suddenly of no importance compared to the ersatz 'magic' of digital slow motion. (As a teenage musician in the early 1980s, I remember going into a recording studio for the first time and, dazzled by the technology, asking for reverb on just about everything. It was the one aural treat I didn't have at home, and because it made everything sound spacier and more portentous, I jammed my finger on that button and wailed away on it – until it dawned on me that when *everything* is swamped in reverb, the music turns to shit. No comparable realisation seems to have hit Jess Franco, whose creative decision-making on *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* is so achingly one-note it's like visual tinnitus.)

If you ask me to be more positive, I guess the increasingly explicit female masturbation in the latter half of the film may arouse a viewer or two. However, the absence of live sound, or indeed any sound from the actors themselves, curtails potential sexiness, and we're never allowed a sign of genuine physical passion. Frankly, I've stroked my cats more passionately than these girls play with their pussies. Much of the time they can't stop looking into the camera lens, as though seeking to establish an erotic connection with the viewer. Quite where this leaves the notion of being trapped in purgatory I don't know: how bad can it be if you can blow kisses and show off your pussy to the outside world? They might as well write notes to their loved ones or cancel their Netflix subscriptions while they're at it. If I had to select a highlight I suppose it's the novelty of seeing an actress waving her bare ass in the camera with a tampon string poking from her vagina. Chalk that one up as 'dare to be different'. At least it gives the scene some dramatic tension, as you wait for one of the other women grazing around the area to bite it and pull. Sadly they never do. Instead, the film ends with the same loitering vacuity with which it began. A cursory zoom into a stone cemetery angel holding a rod in its hand is followed by a

shot of Fata Morgana being 'solarised' into pixelated negative, as if zapped by a pop video director circa 1980. Personally, I think the only fitting punishment for those involved in this wretched video would be to watch it from beginning to end without recourse to a remote control. Calling it experimental is an insult to the whole notion of avant-garde cinema. I don't believe there has been one iota of genuine formal enquiry expended in its construction, nor the slightest commitment to the re-evaluation of cinematic conventions. Lazy, banal and neglectful, *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* isn't 'video-art'; it's digital landfill.

Locations: Except for a shot of waves beating on a rock, and a stone angel in a cemetery, *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* takes place entirely within Jess Franco's Málaga apartment. Sadly even the opportunity to scrutinise the contents of his bookshelves, or nose through his CD collection, is denied to us, thanks to optical blurring, digital high exposure, and colour enhancement of the image, most of which looks like the sort of thing designed to give your holiday iphone clips a dab of instant 'style'.

Connections: In voice-over, a man reads out a story last heard in *Venus in Furs* (1968) ... The format of lesbian sexual activity overlaid with a tangential voice-over recalls *Helter Skelter* (2000).

Other versions: In 2012, *Paula-Paula* producer Ferran Herranz took an interest in the unreleased *La cripta de las mujeres malditas*, which had thus far received only a single festival screening in France. He invited Franco to rework the material into two separate releases, giving rise to *La cripta de las condenadas* and *La cripta de las condenadas II*. Franco decided to change the soundtrack, scoring the new releases with classical and jazz music rather than the contemporary music originally recorded by Ludo, Antoine y Thomas. One suspects that he was still euphoric after dubbing Friedrich Gulda's extraordinary orchestral-jazz onto *Paula-Paula*, and was hoping to achieve a similar enhancement here. *La cripta de las condenadas* borrows from Ravel and Hindemith, and their music is as supple and complex as the images are lazy and passive. It never matches the picture, and whatever synergy Franco was hoping for doesn't happen. In *La cripta de las condenadas II*, Bartók's "Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste" gets a spin during a lesbian cunnilingus scene, although one has to say it's not quite so masterfully suited to the image as it was in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. And just as you thought Franco's taste for out-of-copyright classical music couldn't get any more random, he sets an interminable softcore ass-nuzzling scene to Ravel's "Pavane pour une infante défunte", one of the tenderest and saddest pieces in the French classical canon, written to mourn the death of the composer's baby daughter. What on earth this has to do with two chicks licking each others butts I really have no idea. Finally, Stan Kenton's ritzy jazz serenade "Artistry in Rhythm" kindly offers a lift to the latter part of the film, like a compassionate friend taking a coma victim for a cruise along the streets of New York ...

There are a few visual changes too. Different shots compose the credit sequences, a couple of superimpositions of a graveyard during the sex scenes are lost in the new version, and the female

voice-over that opens *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* is moved to the halfway point in *La cripta de las condenadas*. The most notable addition comes at the end of *La cripta de las condenadas II*: just before the shot of a stone angel apparently doing away with Fata Morgana, a title card states "And finally the Lord decided an exemplary punishment for this continued shamelessness." Such a bald conclusion scotches the idea that sex in the afterlife was a gift to abused virgins from the Queen of the Night; now it seems she's merely a demon to whom God has delegated the task of punishing sinners by giving them, well, lots of enjoyable sex. (Note to God: plan needs more work.) Unfortunately this new information more firmly underlines the means by which God punishes the rapacious lesbian queen: a 'rod' wielded by a stone angel (achieved by means of a swift cut between the angel and the flinching Fata Morgana). Since this comes at the end of a combined two and a half hours of aimless noodling, I feel justified in summoning Sigmund Freud here, for the only instance of phallic symbolism I've bothered to record in this whole two-volume work. Why on Earth would Jess Franco use a phallic symbol, of all things, to 'sort out' a lesbian dominatrix? In fact why invoke 'God' at all? It seems very odd of him to add this element, and to call it an 'exemplary punishment' really rubs salt in the wound. The notion of punishing women for having sex with each other is hugely out of step with his usual stance on such matters. In all other respects, however, *La cripta de las condenadas* and *La cripta de las condenadas II* are essentially the same as *La cripta de las mujeres malditas*, even down to the precise point at which we move from Part 1 to Part 2.

PAULA-PAULA

Spain, 2009

© 2010 CineBinario Films

Production company

CBF aka CineBinario Films (Spain)

Friki Films (Spain) [uncredited]

Timeline

Shooting date:	November	2009
Copyright issued		2010
DVD release	08 February	2011

Running time

US 'Intervision' NTSC DVD	65m10s
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Crew: director: **Jess Franco**. story and dialogue: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Maria Almirall] "inspired by Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde" by R. L. Stevenson". music: **Friedrich Gulda**. musicians: **Friedrich**

Gulda, Sahib Shihab [as 'Sahib Sehab'], **Herb Geller, Ronnie Scott** [as 'Ronie Scott'], **Jimmy Cleveland, Ray Brown**. executive producer: **Alberto Sedano Lancellotti** [as 'Alberto Sedano']. production assistant: **Eva Franch**. camera operators: **Beatriz Alcalá, Jess Franco**. sound: **Borja Lozano**. costumes and make-up: **Lina Romay** [as Rosa Maria Almirall]. editing and special effects: **Jess Franco, Alberto Sedano, Beatriz Alcalá**. "Dedicated to the memory of the maestro Friedrich Gulda."

Note: 'Viel Andere' is erroneously listed as one of the musicians performing with Friedrich Gulda. It actually means "and many others" in German!

Cast: **Carmen Montes** (Paula, a murderer). **Paula Davis** (Paula, a dancer). **Lina Romay** (Alma, a police detective). *Uncredited:* **Alberto Sedano Lancellotti** (Sergeant Mélon).

Synopsis: *Málaga. After performing for a small audience at the Flamingo Club, a dark-haired young woman called Paula is found at her home in a distressed state. She is taken away by Alma, a criminal investigator, for questioning about the recent killing of an erotic dancer, also called Paula, who's been found mortally wounded. At first Paula denies all knowledge of the crime, although she admits she hated the other woman. She also claims to have been involved in sex shows at the Flamingo Club since the age of five, initially at the behest of her father. During the interview, a young policeman, Sergeant Mélon, tells Alma that the victim has died of her injuries. Paula is surprised, claiming that she has already tried five times to kill her and she's always survived... What follows is a montage out of time, as the two Paulas, singly or together, dance and make love, pausing only for the dark-haired Paula to tell a story, direct to camera, about a young female amnesiac who marries a rich and loving prince, only to murder him when she regains her memory, claiming that his palace belongs to the Devil. After prolonged lovemaking between the two women, the dark-haired Paula puts a knife to her namesake's throat and kills her. A title card informs us: "And no one heard about Paula-Paula's show ever again."*

Production notes: Around the time that Jess Franco was awarded the Golden Goya Lifetime Award, in February 2009, he was planning a film with Emilio Schargorodsky, his close collaborator since *Tender Flesh* in 1995. Franco wanted Schargorodsky to direct the film, and the two men spent months planning what was to be a fairly complex adaptation. Sadly the film did not materialise as planned. Schargorodsky explained to me what happened: "We began writing together, a version of *Carmilla*. About a week before production was due to start, we had a very big discussion and he told me he wanted to have all the people in the film naked! Not just one scene, or one person. He'd been telling me from the beginning, 'You are the director', so I believed that. But then, one week before we were going to shoot, he told me, everything's okay but you have to change it. It has to be surrealistic so everybody's gonna be naked. And I said, 'Ah no, I don't feel it like that!' And he said, 'Wait, are you crazy? I have a

reputation!'"¹ Schargorodsky stuck to his guns, at which point the two men parted company on the project. Some small aspects of the *Carmilla* script ended up being incorporated into the opening scenes of Schargorodsky's debut feature film *Dracula 0.9*, which he began filming in 2009 without Franco's involvement. *Dracula 0.9* took three years to complete, and was eventually presented at film festivals in 2012. Just a few months afterwards, the two men met again, as Schargorodsky recalls: "He asked me, 'Okay what happened? Did you shoot something? Yes? Oh, very good!' So from this point we had a relationship back, very very close and much more friendly than ever."² Was Franco testing Schargorodsky when he made his demand for wall-to-wall nudity? If so, by asserting his own vision instead of capitulating to Franco's, the younger man passed with flying colours.

After Franco dropped out of the *Carmilla* project, he quickly turned his attention to another. Financed by a newly established Spanish company called CineBinario Films, set up by Alberto Sedano Lancellotti and Beatriz Alcalá, *Paula-Paula* was shot in 2009 and completed in 2010. A calendar on the wall during a scene in which Paula (Carmen Montes) tries to seduce Sergeant Mélon (Sedano) announces the month as November 2009.

Sedano explained to me the genesis of the project: "Paula-Paula had a very little budget, that was financed by my company CineBinario and a small distribution advanced by a Spanish home-video label. In 2009, me and Beatriz Alcalá, my partner in CineBinario, along with a friend (Sergio Nagore), were thinking about making a web-show called 'Historias del Abismo' (Tales from the Abyss). It would have been a collection of horror and sci-fi short films, *Twilight Zone* style, where a host would have introduced and closed each episode. We thought Jess would be the perfect host for the show, so we got his number and proposed for him to participate. He agreed and we travelled to Málaga for two days shooting, which included the introductions and epilogues for all the planned 'first season' episodes. It was a really great experience. We proposed Jess to direct one of the show's short films and, little by little, that idea grew and became *Paula-Paula*. The web show did not succeed, but we started a fantastic friendship with Jess and Lina."³ As the project grew, Franco discussed the theme of the film with Sedano: "Jess had two ideas that he wanted to work on with for *Paula-Paula*: on one hand, the *Jekyll and Hyde* story, on the other, Cocteau's *The Human Voice*. With these two premises, and the very very modest production conditions we were able to offer him, he created the *Paula-Paula* universe, which, as he used to say, is not a movie but an audiovisual experience."⁴

Review: Subtitled "An audio-visual experience by Jess Franco", *Paula-Paula* makes its position clear from the outset: what follows will have little if anything to do with commercial cinema or storytelling. Throughout his career, Franco's work often steered toward a state of temporal abstraction, abandoning real-time progression in favour of suspension and timelessness. It's a tendency which runs riot in *Paula-Paula*, with four minutes of narrative information preceding sixty-minutes of abstract erotica. The result is more like a video art installation than a piece of





cinema, a technophilic collage of erotic images in which time is immaterial (at least for the characters...).

Two visual ideas account for almost an hour of this 65-minute video. In the first, a semi-nude blonde called Paula dances for the camera, her body mirrored vertically by electronic post-production effects. In the second, the dancer makes love with a dark-haired woman, also called Paula: video footage of their erotic encounter is slowed down to quarter speed and treated with post-production effects. The 'mirrored dancer' motif occurs eight times in the film, sometimes just for a few seconds, sometimes in longer sequences interpolated with shots of the other woman gazing at the camera or putting on her stockings. The longest such occurrence lasts a whopping seven minutes, and the last, roughly four minutes, is interwoven with the murder at the end of the film, as the dark-haired Paula attacks her dancing namesake.

The mirrored dancing shots are the most striking thing about *Paula-Paula*. Along with the unsettling effect of artificial symmetry, the mirroring gives rise to fantasmagorical chimeras, which seem to emerge like ghosts or fleshly mutations from an imperceptible fold or vertical horizon in the centre of the image. By 'flipping' and copying the picture along the vertical axis Franco turns the belly-dancing Paula into a succession of bizarre hallucinations: weird symmetrical skin-forms emerge, quasi-labial shapes proliferate, details of costume and curvaceous flesh generate strange new slits, apertures and clefts. The actress's undulating dance induces a queasy miasmic sensation: voluptuousness becomes grotesque and cyclopean, islands of flesh detach from the body's gyrating mainland, hinting at fractal forms. A frequent effect of the mirroring is the manifestation of a third breast in the centre of the actress's torso: combined with her facial piercings, which sit at the corners of her mouth like fangs, we're irresistibly reminded of the notion that witches possess a third nipple...

The second of these dominant visual motifs, the two Paulas making love in slow motion, accounts for thirty minutes of screen time, surely the longest lesbian love scene in the history of the moving image. It should be noted that this thirty minute scene is not an uninterrupted take: I spotted a single edit, nine minutes in, so technically what we have is a nine-minute shot followed by a twenty-one minute shot. Even so, the latter could still be the longest lesbian lovemaking shot in film and video history. Someone inform the *Guinness Book of Records*!

A problem I have with all of Franco's video productions is that they lack what I would call the 'dream-life' of film. Something in the physical mechanism of celluloid, in the flicker of twenty-four frames a second, and the grainy imprecision of its detail, creates a vital distance between the viewer and the image. In that distance there is space to dream while awake. Video image quality on the other hand is immediate, real-time, relentlessly clear and present, pressed tightly to the screen by the vacuum of its banality. Video is wakefulness without imagination; evidence without a crime; sleep without REMs. Ironically, it's only by exaggeratedly breaking the persistence-of-vision illusion that video can begin to reclaim some

of the dream-space of celluloid. The particular slow-motion effect used by Franco throughout the second half of *Paula-Paula* creates a continuous 'blur' which on closer scrutiny turns out to be a double image. If you freeze-frame the DVD at any point during this sequence, you'll see a doubling of detail, along edges in particular. It's as if we can see, superimposed over each frozen moment, the dying breath of the moment before it. Among all the post-production effects which Franco used on his video works between 1996 and 2013, most of which are simply irksome, this slowing/blurring/superimposition brings us closest to the dreamlike aura of film. There's way too much of it in *Paula-Paula*, but at least it has some visual beauty. It offers a pleasurable alternative to persistence of vision by giving the brain two parallel time-streams to 'track' simultaneously.

The synopsis I've provided includes literally all that we discover about the two Paulas. Their problems, their desires and their lives are pretty much opaque to us. Most of what we might laughingly call the plot is concentrated into the first five minutes. The character played by Lina Romay (probably a cop since she has a gun) appears during this early portion of the film but doesn't turn up again later. The wisp of a story provided by her 'investigation' cannot be said to frame the abstraction that follows because there's no development, no outcome, no closure. Franco hints at circularity and a purgatorial dimension: when the murderous Paula learns that her namesake has died, she says, "*Are you sure she's dead? I've tried it five times already and she's hard, she doesn't die easily.*" It seems that Paula is locked into a cycle of sex and murder, but we have no way of telling if the murder we see at the end of the film is a flashback, or just another turn on an ever-spinning wheel.

Why Paula hates the other Paula remains a mystery, although we're left scrabbling for clues in a curious story she tells directly to camera, about an amnesiac girl who marries a prince and lives with him in his beautiful palace. One day the girl attacks her husband without warning, and kills him in a fury. As he dies, he asks her why she did it, to which she replies, "*I have just remembered where I've already seen a palace such as this one. This palace is exactly the same as the Devil's, deep inside hell.*" What are we to make of this story, a kind of allegory or fairytale told to us by a murderess? Naturalistic audio recording conveys Paula's voice realistically, in what sounds like an uninterrupted single take, but her image is conveyed with numerous cross-fades and superimpositions, her face doubled on itself, and staggered in time. (Given that the lip-synch is perfect in this sequence, it seems likely that the actress delivered her lines with gaps in between, which were then edited out. I'm pretty sure that Franco read the lines to Montes and she repeated them, something we actually hear him doing in his next film, *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*. Afterwards the editor simply removed Franco's prompts and sutured the remaining shots of Montes using cross-fades, thus keeping sound and picture in synch.)

More interesting than the technical aspect, though, is the question of interpretation. In the story, a woman comes to believe that her happy home is in fact a palace in Hell. Whether or not her

princely husband is the Devil himself is left unspecified. He could be the 'prince of darkness', or he could be just another denizen of the abyss. This infernal abode, however, is a palace of lies, a fraudulent trap for a lost soul. Underlying the story, then, is a deep ambivalence about the concept of home, and domestic happiness. It's worth pointing out that by the time Franco made *Paula-Paula* he was virtually housebound, living on the second floor of an apartment block in the centre of Málaga. His failing health had left him in a wheelchair, and his modest financial circumstances meant that he couldn't afford a home more comfortable for a person in his condition. Like *La cripta de las mujeres malditas*, *Paula-Paula* was made entirely in Franco's apartment, except for some brief shots in the backstreets of Málaga, so it's striking that 'home' should be referred to in the film as a chamber of Hell in disguise. The cosmopolitan life which Franco had lived for so long, hopping here and there, on trains and planes, to France, to Germany, to Portugal, to Switzerland, to Italy, had come to an end. All his work in the last four years of his life was shot in one seaside town, a short distance from his apartment. *Paula-Paula* sees him take the limitations of his situation to their logical end-point, without even landscape to breathe fresh sea air into this claustrophobic experience. It's a film made between the front-room wall and the dining table, between the hallway and the picture window. At times we can plainly see Franco's flatscreen television set in the background. We are, in effect, silent astral visitors to the director's home. With a cavalier lack of concern for privacy, Franco films *Paula-Paula* amid his bookcases, CD shelves and domestic clutter. I must admit I still don't understand why the shelves and cupboards could not have been removed, so that the rooms could become more abstract, like studio spaces, or Franco's beloved hotel rooms. It would have taken a couple of strong lads half an hour to move the furniture out of the sitting room, and then back in afterwards! Were there really so few people willing to help? I doubt it. Franco seems to have had a small but enthusiastic group of young friends in Málaga who would have sprung to his assistance if he'd asked. No, if the bookshelves and knick-knacks are there, either Franco wanted them there for artistic reasons, or else he didn't care one way or the other.

This issue of 'care' brings me to my reservations about *Paula-Paula*. With the strangeness and avant-gardism of the project acknowledged and given credit, I have to say I remain sceptical and critical of the film. There's a big difference between limitations forced upon a production by lack of funds, and failings caused by a lack of effort. It must be borne in mind that although Franco was physically frail, he was still mentally alert. The points I raise against *Paula-Paula* are aimed at areas where I can see no outside impediment, either financial or physical, to account for them.

To put it bluntly – when a video production is this simple, with so few ingredients, shoddiness is hard to ignore. Take for instance the three large sheets of Mylar (a reflective substance rather like tin-foil) mounted onto support frames, which are used to transform Franco's living room into a fantasy space of distorted

reflections and shifting textures. These three 'flats' do not disguise the fact that we're in a completely ordinary apartment. They are too small to conceal the room's fixtures and fittings, and barely hint at the notion of an enclosed fantasy world. What one suspects is meant to feel hermetic, mysterious, cut off from normality, instead merely gestures toward this ideal. The problem is made worse by some brain-achingly careless set management: during the thirty minute lesbian sex scene that takes up basically the second half of the film, one of the three Mylar flats is crumpled at the bottom edge by a scrunched up carpet which has pressed against the reflector, creating a huge pucker at one corner. This ugly blot on the geometry is allowed to remain on screen as the minutes roll by. Given that Franco is shooting on video, it would be the easiest thing in the world to stop, fix the carpet malfunction, and start again. We're not dealing with expensive 35mm film, or a union crew being paid by the hour. Yet still this visual annoyance is allowed through, even though it screams at the attentive viewer and compromises the already fragile 'world-building' of the film. What seems so dismayingly careless is the fact that Franco declines to exert control over the visual field, even when his palette is so drastically reduced and the elements in play are so few. Instead of celebrating a delinquent reality out of the director's control, as such accidents of detail do in the location shoots of his regular movies, this rolled-up carpet acts as an unwelcome reminder that the project is being played out within the cramped environs of a domestic living room. Another irritation comes when you notice that someone is behind one of the Mylar flats, running a finger up and down the rear surface so that patterns and refractions shift as the visible surface kinks and bends. It's a good idea; so why is no one doing the same to the other Mylar surfaces? Surely all three should be shimmering in the same way? If all three were moving, it would look like a style choice. If only one is moving, it looks half-assed.

If these criticisms sound petty, or an example of a critic thinking he knows better than the filmmaker how to realise a vision, I have to disagree. I'm willing to go all the way with Franco on this project, to accept it as an experimental work, a joyous surrender to hallucinatory miasma. But I find it much harder to embrace a lack of care and attention. I put my reservations to Alberto Sedano recently, and he offered this account of Franco's point of view, and in the absence of the man himself it seems fair to give him the last word: "*Regarding the silver panels, I think Jess liked the idea of creating a sort of strange universe which mixed reality and fantasy, showing the 'tricks' and mechanisms that shaped that universe. A kind of deal with the spectator, where both fiction and reality are emphasized.*"⁵

Cast and crew: Sedano found himself credited onscreen in other capacities too, as he explained to me in 2018: "*I was surprised when I found myself credited for special effects and editing! I wasn't in charge of either (editing was Beatriz's role), although I was present during the whole editing process and even worked as an editor for a few days at the beginning.*"⁶ On the subject of *Paula-Paula*'s mesmerising visual effects, he explained, "*They are all digital effects created with video*

editing software on a MacPro computer. So the process was relatively fast and allowed us to get everything done at Jess and Lina's home. Due to Jess' physical condition, we decided to set-up a small editing station in a room of their home. Jess asked us to show him what effects the editing software had available, and we did some tests with the ones he preferred. Then he would ask for the images where he would like to include the effects. He was fascinated by them. We worked there for a whole month, enjoying also the lunch breaks for which Lina cooked wonderful meals (flavored with Jess' anecdotes)."⁷

Music: Friedrich Gulda's music is astoundingly good, and its rich tonal palette shifts through moods of quivering excitement, lurking menace, brooding disquiet and celebratory passion. Born in Vienna in 1930, Gulda began learning piano aged seven, at the Wiener Volkskonservatorium. At the age of twelve he entered the Vienna Music Academy, where he studied piano and musical theory. As the Second World War raged on, Gulda and his friend Joe Zawinul (later the co-founder of Weather Report) played jazz gigs around town, in violation of government prohibitions against it. Gulda went on to build an outstanding reputation in both classical music and jazz, as well as working in free improvisation, duetting with avant-garde giants like Cecil Taylor, and learning to play baritone sax. He was also something of a prankster: he wrote songs under his own name and sang them under the pseudonym 'Albert Golowin' wearing a wig and a fake beard. He then used trick photography to provide 'evidence' of Friedrich Gulda and 'Albert Golowin' performing together, successfully fooling music critics for years. In jazz, he said, he had found "the rhythmic drive, the risk, the absolute contrast to the pale, academic approach I had been taught."⁸ His unorthodox attitude – refusing to dress formally, declining to announce the programme of his concerts in advance, announcing his own death in a press release so that a concert at a prestigious Vienna hall could serve as a 'resurrection party', all suggest a kindred spirit to Franco, who no doubt found Gulda's antics very amusing! I asked Alberto Sedano about the Gulda score, and about Franco's methodology when it came to synchronising the music: "The Gulda music was one of the first elements attached to the project. Jess had received in an inheritance the right to use these Gulda pieces for a film and he had been thinking about making a film for them since then... I think it was like a jazz musician improvising during a recording. For each scene, we did different editing takes, playing with image and music. Each day, Jess asked to watch the previously edited scenes and then incorporated changes and made a new edit."⁹

Locations: Franco's apartment in Málaga, Spain.

Connections: It's best to put aside the reference in the credits to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; it makes not one iota of sense in relation to the story. The two Paulas are definitely not aspects of the same person; they are two different women, recognised as such by the other characters. And despite the victim-Paula being the recipient of Franco's mirror fx, we have no reason to believe that she's the one with a 'Jekyll and Hyde' personality. In fact we learn nothing about her at all, certainly no indication of a 'dark side'. Even the story told by Paula the murderess, about

the woman who kills her husband, lacks parallels to the Stevenson story: yes she suddenly attacks her husband out of the blue, but her belief that they are in hell means she's simply a religious psychotic. Mr. Hyde is the personification of lustful/violent forces repressed by rational and civilised individuals: the murderous Paula gives no such indication of two warring facets to her personality ... A poster for Franco's 1984 film *Camino solitario* can be seen on the wall ... When Paula tries to seduce Sergeant Mélon, she sings a few notes of a tune previously sung by Lina Romay in *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties* (1980) and *El hotel de los ligues* (1982) ... The Flamingo Club, for decades a venue for insalubrious goings-on in Franco's films, adds a particularly low note to its sleazy history: if we're to believe Paula's statement to the police, she performed a live sex show there with her father, when she was five years old ... Franco's curious failure in *Paula-Paula* to use the mirror motif coherently recalls a similar structural problem in *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray* (1975), whose parallels to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were equally imperceptible.

AL PEREIRA VS. THE ALLIGATOR LADIES

Spain, 2012

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Production companies

Manacoa Films (Spain)

Pellicules et essai (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date	July	2012
Sitges Film Festival	11 October	2012
Madrid	22 March	2013
Barcelona	23 March	2013
Breda, NL (BUT Film Festival)	08 June	2013
Spanish DVD release	10 July	2013
Portland Underground Film Festival	25 August	2013

Running time

SP 'Cameo' PAL DVD	80m36s
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director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**, **Antonio Mayans**. producer: **Jess Franco**, **Ferran Herranz**. executive producer: **Xabier Ciruca**. director of photography: **Fernando Barranquero**. music: **Jess Franco** [as 'Pablo Villa']. songs: "Good Morning" (Raúl Jiménez, Juan Manuel Celorio) performed by **Tokyo Sex Destruction**, courtesy of BCore Disc, © BCore Disc; "Kiss Me" (Raúl Jiménez, Carlos Jiménez, Joan Robert,

Josep Joan Masana) performed by **The Lions Constellation**, courtesy of BCore Disc, © BCore Disc. editor: **Jess Franco**. art director: **Luisje Moyano**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. assistant director: **Antonio Mayans** [as 'Robert Fotrer']. digital post-production: **Dani Salama**, **Manuel Yunta**. assistant editor: **Jordi Serrano**. camera assistant: **Antonio Patas**. sound: **Lluís Bezonca**. sound editor: **Alberto Edca**. sound mixer: **SCE**. make-up and costumes: **Alice Camacho**. catering: **Alligator Ladies**. making of: **Naxo Fiol**. Thanks: **Ándale Audiovisual**, **Artistic Metropol**, **Aquí Vale Todo**, **BCore Disc**, **Donostia Kultura**, **El Buque Maldito**, **El Franconomicon**, **Festival de Sitges**, **I'm in a JF State of Mind**, **La Abadia de Berzano**, **Nafra Col·lecció**. **Nostradamus Pictures**, **Pasadizo**, **Señorío de Lepanto**, **Versus Entertainment**, 2000 maniacos. Muchas gracias: **Óscar Albert**, **Andreas Bethmann**, **Juan Blanco**, **Xavier Catafal**, **Francesco Cesari**, **Jordi Costa**, **Eduard Cujó**, **Bertram Dietze**, **Paco Fox**, **Carsten Frank**, **Héctor García**, **Nacho García Morcillo**, **Eloi Horta**, **Mike Hostench**, **Daniel Ill**, **Raúl Jiménez**, **Diego López**, **Victor Martí**, **Rubén Martínez**, **Vicens Mayans**, **Álex Mendíbil**, **Robert Monell**, **Carles Montiel**, **Manuel Monzón**, **Ángel Mora**, **Frank Muñoz**, **Gerd Naumann**, **Celia Novis**, **Victor Olid**, **Juan Antonio Palomar**, **Carlos Pérez**, **Daniel Pérez Agudo**, **Daniel Pérez Soucase**, **Carles Prats**, **Javi Pueyo**, **Aroa Rodríguez**, **Ángel Sala**, **José Luis Salvador**, **Emilio Schargorodsky**, **Pedro Temboury**, **Manuel Valencia**, **José Roberto Vila**.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** (Al Pereira). **Irene Verdú** [as 'Debbie Logan'] (Alligator Lady 1). **Carmen Montes** (Alligator Lady 2). **Paula Davis** (Alligator Lady 3). **Luisje Moyano** (Sal Pereira, Al's son). **Naxo Fiol** (Reñueles). **Mariví Carrillo** (Agridina). **Paco Rius** (Cáspez). **Maria Ho** (Mora). **Fernando Barranquero** (Dr. Muerte). **Nestora Robles** (Philippino lady). **Uncredited:** **Jesús Franco** (the director). **Sergio Kato** (Nestor).

Production notes: In late 2011, Lina Romay mentioned to a friend that she felt unusually tired and couldn't understand why. Her friend, who had connections with a hospital in Málaga, suggested that she go for a check-up and put her in touch with a suitable doctor. The resulting diagnosis was simple, and shocking. Romay had cancer. In the following weeks, her health deteriorated rapidly. She died on 15 February 2012, aged just 57. Friends who had seen her looking healthy and happy just a few months earlier could scarcely take in the news, but the greatest shock of all was suffered by Jess Franco. He and Romay had lived side-by-side for nearly forty years, and for much of that time they were inseparable. Between 1980 and 1990, Romay appeared in all but thirteen of Franco's fifty-seven films (missing only *Devil Hunter*, *Sadomania*, *Bloody Moon*, *Linda*, *Oasis of the Zombies*, *El siniestro doctor Orloff*, *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle*, *The Sexual Story of O*, *En busca del dragón dorado*, *Viaje a Bangkok*, *ataúd incluido*, *Dark*

Mission, and *Fall of the Eagles*). Since Franco's mid-nineties decision to shoot on videotape she'd appeared in everything except *La cripta de las mujeres malditas*. Without Romay, his lover and muse, Franco was bereft of the companionship which had sustained him through three-and-a-half decades. And, as often happens with couples torn apart by untimely death, he struggled to move on after such a terrible shock...

"I've done a lot of films, and I know deeply that, in all of cinema, there is no director who is as good as Shakespeare. Excuse me for being pessimistic, though. I'm not pessimistic – I love it. I love my business. I love cinema." – Jess Franco ¹

Review: After the execrable *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* and the experimental *Paula-Paula*, two scorched-earth videos without characters or coherent structure, one might have thought Jess Franco was done with narrative altogether. In the traumatic wake of Lina Romay's death, however, close friend and trusted lieutenant Antonio Mayans reasoned that the best thing to do, under the circumstances, was to get Franco behind the camera again as soon as possible. The result was *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, his best film in twenty-five years.

If the previous two films had dropped a bomb on Franco's cinematic world, *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* sees him returning to the blast site, picking up and playing with the torn and shattered remnants: characters, dialogue, interaction. One has to strain a point to add narrative to that list, as there's precious little storytelling here, and no real through-line. What we get instead is a kind of Godardian fragmentation of storytelling, with weird situations and bizarre interactions between thinly sketched characters collaged into a mélange of deconstruction and detachment: part private eye movie, part softcore porno film, part fantastical mystery, all undercut by a persistent self-irony. Instead of suturing these elements into a narrative, Franco dissolves their possible connections by stressing the material condition of the film's production. He gives instructions off camera and on, deliberately contrives shots so that he and the filming apparatus are reflected in mirrors, and at one point gets into a convoluted argument with the cast which not only critiques the playing of the scene but casts doubt on the phenomenological status of the argument itself. The central character of Al Pereira makes constant asides to the audience, the 'Alligator Ladies' ('alligator' is slang for vagina) dance for the delectation of Franco's camera with little or no fictional context, and from about halfway-through, a seemingly random collage of skits and interludes cascades in glorious absurdity. With the good stuff concentrated mostly in the second half of the film, it's a lopsided, occasionally trying experience, but one that's worth sticking with. It's simultaneously Franco's final piece of narrative play, his last ever sex film, a rehearsal that becomes a performance, a prank, an inside-out deconstruction, a comic dream about the artist's final statement, a film that doubles as its

very own making-of documentary, and a self-conscious parody of all these things. It's by far and away the best thing Franco directed in his later years, and though it shares some of the flaws of his 21st century output, it's also peppered with his antic, wayward sense of humour and his love of the avant-garde. Oh, and it's a *de facto* farewell note, written near the end of one of the most fecund and ebullient careers in cinema history.

...Pereira wakes from a nightmare in which he fails to save a group of 'babies', meaning beautiful women (babes), during a shoot-out. He enters a deserted hotel conference room in which two nude women or 'Alligator Ladies', Irene Verdú and Paula Davis, are dancing and fondling each other. Turning to the camera, he introduces himself as Al Pereira, private eye. Soon tiring of watching the women, he departs...

Al Pereira, the perennially unfortunate private eye whom Franco first unveiled in the 1960s, was played in the 1970s by Howard Vernon (*Les Ébranlées*), Jean Ferrère (*Je brûle de partout*) and Franco himself (*Downtown*) before becoming the permanent responsibility of Antonio Mayans (*Botas negras, látigo de cuero; Camino solitario; Barrio Chino; La chica de los labios rojos*). In this final iteration Pereira is a transcendental figure: he's both a resident of the fictional Franco universe and a commentator on his own depiction, addressing the audience directly. Mayans, and the character of Al Pereira, act as beacons, marker buoys leading back to the mainland of cinema. Franco, however, long ago turned his back on terra firma and decided to live with the mermaids: sure enough, his commitment to the summoning of a fictional world is fleeting at best. The notion of a fictional universe is subjected in this film to a barrage of obstructions and booby-traps. For instance, the first time we see one of the 'Alligator Ladies' of the title, Irene Verdú, she's walking towards us across the polished wooden floor of a brightly lit room, some kind of hotel or public venue where the tables and chairs have been packed away. Sunlight streams in through huge windows. In the background, three film lights on metal stands add their illumination. As she walks towards the camera, she immediately looks at the lens. No other character is present, so her gaze is meant for the camera, for Jess Franco, and if you're feeling left out, you could say it's meant for you too. All three of the Alligator Ladies will, at various times, gaze at the camera like this. The fourth wall has been sent packing. Of course this immediately punctures the narrative which the previous shot had set in motion, of a man called Al Pereira waking from a nightmare. (Are the previous Al Pereira films his dreams?) A second 'Alligator Lady' (Paula Davis) enters the room, and the two women dance together. Needless to say, both are naked. After a few minutes of gyration, Pereira walks in, dressed in a crisp black suit. Instead of speaking to the women, he turns to the camera and addresses us directly: "My name is Al Pereira, I'm the sharpest private detective, or as they say in the movies, 'private eye'. Highly private." So now everyone has acknowledged the camera. And so it will go throughout the film: we are shuttled back and forth constantly between fiction and deconstruction.

...Two 'Alligator Ladies', Irene Verdú and Carmen Montes, are having simulated sex in an out-of-hours hotel bar. Al Pereira appears, and begins 'directing' them as though he's making a movie. Describing himself as "a visitor" he chastises the giggling girls and tells them to be serious ... Montes dances nude against a large mirror, at the behest of a film director – judging by appearances Jess Franco – whom we see in the reflection. He tells Montes to physically slap the camera and storm off, which she does. A jump cut takes us forward in time: Franco carefully positions Verdú in shot so that he himself is also visible to the camera. Antonio Mayans stands behind Franco, silently watching. "Move your ass slowly and rhythmically while you're provoking him. Imagine he's the camera," Franco tells Verdú. More sexy frolics ensue...

In the first half of the film Franco can't quite shake off his recent habits: gazing through a video camera at naked women as a substitute for any kind of cinema. And yes, we're still dealing with videotape, the mundane 'here-and-nowness' of which is inescapable. A flawless but deathly image. The uncharm of digital code. As Carmen Montes struts her shaved pussy for the camera, in a shot with all the visual texture of *Cash in the Attic*, there's no screen dream for the actress to inhabit, and plenty of time for us to think about the cursed inflammation caused by razoring one's pubes. These 'erotic performance' scenes are long, repetitious, totally banal in terms of what's shown, and lacking in visual inventiveness. It's a technologically mediated lap dance, with all the lights switched on. Whether or not one finds the girls physically attractive, their presentation of sexuality is relentlessly artificial; somewhere between fashion shoot and cable porn show. This predilection for women flirting with the camera turns early sections of *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* into a flat exo-narrative, where the only story being told is 'Jess Franco in a Málaga conference room filming naked girls'. The zoom lens is used from time to time, but it moves with sterile automatic precision. There's no delirium, just a succession of tableaux vivants. (It's worth pondering why Franco's use of the camera here is so bereft of visual interest. It barely moves, tethered as it is of course to a man stuck in a wheelchair. What's interesting is that Franco is clearly unwilling to pass the camera to someone who can move it on his behalf. His position as director is resolutely *with the camera*: anything else for him would be less than directing.)

...Pereira tracks the Alligator Ladies to an out-of-hours restaurant. Declaring them 'excommunicated', he throws them out. They leave, taunting him for being a 'fag'. Pereira goes home where he's pounced upon by Verdú. They greet each other as former lovers. Verdú tries to shoot him but the gun is too old and doesn't work. Later she confesses to Davis that she couldn't finish the job because Pereira is too handsome...

Throughout the film, post-production visual effects have been pared back; there's not a lot of mucking around with saturation and optical effects. Most of the time the image looks like professional high-end television, particularly in the scenes shot at Al Pereira's house (actually a wood-panelled hotel lounge). However, this means that it suffers from the same problem all

that digital ‘mucking around’ was trying to address in the films made between 1998 and 2005: too much reality. The film’s crystal-clear digital image (and direct sound) means that the film has images but no ‘imaginary’.

...*A mysterious Asian woman, some kind of Alligator Lady guru, curses and threatens the three women from a blue-tinted smoky realm. She insists that they must kill Pereira, and mentions in passing that they are the daughters of Fu Manchu...*

Trying to ‘believe’ in the fictional world of *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* induces a strange sense of being locked out of a fantasy; rather like those lonely and exasperating nights when one cannot sleep, when dreams refuse to come, when one hovers at the brink but cannot ‘get under’, like a man made of cork trying to swim underwater. Yet by some clever wrangling of reality, Franco contrives to give this film a progressively dreamier tone: the kind of dream in which you’re utterly convinced you’re awake. The tipping point is a strange and convoluted scene in which Al Pereira brandishes a gun at the Alligator Ladies while they lie on his bed and provoke him...

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT: On the bed are two of the ‘Alligator Ladies’: Irene Verdú and Paula Davis. Standing beside them, holding a gun, is Antonio Mayans playing Al Pereira. The women goad Pereira and try to seduce him. Off camera we hear Jess Franco speaking to Mayans:

JF: Antonio, bend down.

AM: Down?

JF: While we’re rehearsing I’ll say: ‘Antonio!’ – Don’t look at me. Ask ‘What do I do now?’ As if this was your first movie.

AM: It’s not a rehearsal. We are supposed to be shooting. And then you say: ‘Bend down now.’ And I ask: ‘Should I bend down like this or sideways?’

JF: Let’s turn off the light and see.

AM: No, you tell me. You gotta tell me what I’m gonna do in the next scene. Say: ‘And then bend down here.’ Just say whatever I’ll have to do and I’ll do it. Alright?

JF: Alright.

AM: It’s your call.

JF: I told you.

This bizarre and fascinating exchange between director and star, exactly halfway through the film, is like a rebirth for the film. It’s a Max Escher staircase, seeming to lead somewhere comprehensible and yet ending up somewhere impossible. What at first appears to be an ‘out-take’ dropped into the action, in which Mayans rehearses a scene with Verdú and Davis while Franco offers guidance, quickly turns into something stranger: Mayans and Franco are playing themselves performing a scene in which they disagree about whether they’re acting or rehearsing. In the *melée* we lose sight of the boundary between rehearsal and

performance, between actor and director, between fiction and documentary. Franco, by acceding to Mayans’s insistence that this is a take, not a rehearsal, cedes authority to the actor, but as director and writer he (presumably) came up with the scene himself. Mayans insists that their exchange is part of the actual scene, not a rehearsal, thus ‘pulling’ Franco into the scenario (as an actor playing the director), and by reiterating what Franco has just said, the scene loops back like a Mobius strip, shifting the plane of reality. Neither documentary out-take nor action within a fictive space, but somehow impossibly both. The general weirdness and paradoxical nature of it all is exemplified by Franco’s gnomic/poetic statement, “*Let’s turn off the light and see,*” a Lewis Carroll-like invocation of nonsense as the gateway to knowledge. The scene concludes with a change of camera angle, a change of wig for Paula Davis from blonde to brunette (shades of David Lynch’s *Mulholland Dr.*), and a brace of gunshots: Pereira shoots the two Alligator Ladies dead. Standing over the bodies he declares, “*The whims of life: in two seconds, two bullets kill two whores. May God welcome them in his bosom.*” Gesturing to the audience with his gun, he concludes on a bizarrely upbeat note, “*Coming soon, the latest adventures of Al Pereira!*”, delivered with a grin and a flourish and a cartoon Superman gesture. Franco dubs applause over the shot and Mayans takes a bow, beaming widely.

So let’s talk about Al Pereira, the only recurring male ‘hero’ in Franco’s cinema (Doctor Orloff, it’s fair to say, is more of a villain). He’s the repository of Franco’s fondness for pulp fiction, film noir, rogueish lotharios and hardboiled detective clichés. Affecting a cynical Chanderlesque attitude to the ‘whores’ with whom he sleeps, Pereira is straight out of the 1940s, perfectly willing to slap a woman around if the case requires it. Franco, however, always lands him in more trouble than he can handle: time and again the women get the upper hand. Two-fisted masculinity may win a few battles along the way, but it always loses the war. This takes a cue from the fatalistic tendency in film noir, with its propensity for despairing males and manipulative women. So what is the state of Pereira as he approaches the end of the line? Well, instead of a roll in the bedclothes with the Alligator Ladies, he’s curt and dismissive of their attempts to arouse him. Watching them having sex on a conference table, he snaps “*I’ve seen this show a million times. You make me sick,*” before walking out of shot and leaving them to it. Is the fictional character speaking here? Given how dreamlike the film becomes, and bearing in mind that in dreams everything and everyone represents the dreamer, is Franco using Pereira to express his own disillusionment? If so, the ineffectual erotica in the first half of the film can be seen as evidence of an obsessional compulsion. After all, continuing to do something when you’re heartily sick of it is the very essence of addiction. This, in many ways, is a film about letting go, so maybe Pereira’s outburst is the closest Franco could get to letting go of the core of his cinema (the adoration of women) in readiness for the hour when all earthly desires must be surrendered. Soon after this, Pereira expands on his feelings: “*Shame on them. Shame on them with their tits and asses*

[...] They're trying to lead us on the path of doom. And they succeed. And how they succeed. But all of this will end. It will end. It's too bad, because those asses are really nice. But it will all end." This peculiar outburst carries a number of levels of meaning. Pereira, the hapless private eye who's been shafted and conned by unscrupulous femme fatales since *Les Ébranlées* in 1972, sounds as though he has finally snapped and 'found God'. His outburst is that of a religious hypocrite blaming the desired for his desire (all the more so considering that the soundtrack music here is a Daniel White organ piece used in *The Sadist of Notre Dame*, a film in which Franco himself played a religious maniac who murders women because they 'make him' feel lust). This musical and thematic echo of *The Sadist of Notre Dame*, one of Franco's favourites of his own films, supports once again the idea that Pereira in this film, according to the logic of dreams, is a proxy for Franco himself. In his complaints about women leading men to their doom, we hear the niggling worm of Catholic guilt in Franco, the worm which Catholicism instils in boys who as adults must constantly fight against embedded sexual loathing and the hatred of 'sinful women'. After a brief interregnum, Pereira returns to the theme from a different angle: "Shame on me. Life has forced Al Pereira to become a sacristan." (Note: in the Catholic Church a sacristan is a church employee who does menial tasks, such as laying out hymn books before mass.) What does Franco mean by 'life' forcing Pereira into the arms of religion? Given the auto-deconstructing tendency of the film, can we not rather say that it is Franco, not 'life', who has 'forced' the character into this position of hypocrisy? And what does Pereira/Mayans mean by "shame on me"? Is Pereira ashamed of his earlier outburst against women, whose delights he so willingly tasted in previous films? Or is it Mayans speaking? Does the actor express dismay at this mortifying change to his long-running character? After all, Franco is portraying Pereira as a humbug-merchant, a religious and sexual hypocrite, rather as he did with Doctor Orloff in *Faceless*. In a post-credits coda, in the place usually designated for a last joke in a comedy film, we see Franco comment to a nearby technician, "We've made Al Pereira look like a complete dickhead. But it doesn't matter at all." I wonder if it mattered to Mayans? It's worth pointing out that the presence of at least some narrative in *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* was partially determined by Mayans' insistence that the project should have more in common with films like *Camino solitario* than the video abstractions Franco had recently directed. Mayans thus assumes a degree of influence and creative involvement which would flourish in the posthumously completed *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies*. But Pereira as a character is holed beneath the waterline here: Franco decides to make him that least appealing thing, a moral hypocrite. The intention seems to be to render him utterly absurd, to shatter his remaining credibility and throw him in the dustbin. The other males in *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* are either comedy retards (like 'Sal Pereira', the detective's long lost son), passing enigmas like Paco Rius, or members of the crew allowed to wander into frame. Franco's two previous films, *La cripta de las mujeres malditas* and *Paula-Paula*,

featured only one male character between them (Sergeant Mélon, on screen for a less than a minute in *Paula-Paula*). It's as though Franco, dismantling and folding away his cinema in preparation for death, has finally decided to consign Pereira, his favourite male character, to the same bonfire as the rest of masculinity: just a well-thumbed paperback crime novel tossed on the fire.

With the 'seen-it-all-before' sexual antics happily left behind, the film enters its antic and dreamlike 'final act': a delirious trip to various symbolic and allusive landmarks of Franco's cinema. A close-up of deep red blood spattered on parquet flooring summons memories of *Vámpiros Lesbos* and its totemic close-ups. Irene Verdú smokes a cigarette standing by a window balcony, silhouetted against the sky, stirring memories of Alice Arno in *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*. Following Franco's audible instructions, Verdú sings a scatological ditty to herself: "*Al Pereira is mine. I've never had it like this. Such a hard dick. And the Eastern Wind. And... I let one off. Softly*" – such an ode to erections and female flatulence coming as no surprise from a man who bedecked earlier films with songs like "La vie est une merde" and "The Taste of Your Sperm". Sticking with music for a moment, the 'slap bass from hell' first used in *Downtown Heat* gets plenty of air-time, the organ theme from *The Sadist of Notre Dame* adds liturgical mournfulness, the speeded up rinky-dink bordello piano first used in *Eugénie, historia de una perversion* ("Piano Roll") gets one last chance to irritate the world, the acoustic guitar version of "Madeira" from *Al otro lado del espejo* send the shiver of temps perdu through a number of scenes, Daniel White's lovely "Monologue Pour Guitare Brésilienne" from *Monologue Pour...* (1973) is heavily featured, and the stripper theme which the dearly missed Lina Romay sang in many a film is finally named: it's "Blues in the Night" written by Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer and sung by black actor William Gillespie in the 1941 film of the same name. The song, with lyrics adjusted for male or female singers, became a classic and was interpreted by dozens of major artists: Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Lee, Cab Calloway, Rosemary Clooney, Peggy Lee, Frank Sinatra, Louis Armstrong, Shirley Bassey, and Judy Garland, to name but a few.

Amid the delirium we see Pereira's murder of the Alligator Ladies again, except one of them is Carmen Montes, not Paula Davis. The sequence is lensed this time in a much more dynamic way than before (hand-held shots, low angles, rapid editing) as Pereira follows the women into their bedroom and 'pumps them full of lead'. Franco verbally cues the action off camera, and the whole scene summons the Godardian lunacy of *El sexo está loco*, which is by far the closest relative to this equally whacked-out film. Paula Davis stands at the window wondering why she's agreed to meet Pereira. "How fucked up! Why am I thinking about a bastard like Al Pereira? He's a jerk. he has no authority. He has no balls. But I like him," she muses, echoing a conversation between Lina Romay and Martine Stedil in the earlier Pereira film *Downtown* ... Cut to one of the film's best sequences, as Mayans, Davis and Verdú, filmed from a vantage point alongside Franco-as-director, rehearse a scene in front of a mirror held by a production assistant.

Immediately afterwards we see 'the scene itself' as captured by a second camera. The only thing missing, quite deliberately I think, is any sensible reason for the mirror to be there in the first place! It's being held by a technician who lets it wobble around throughout the shot, when it could just as easily have been propped up firmly. The technician, by the way, has no other function in the scene except to hold up the mirror – badly! It's like a surreal joke about complex *mise-en-scène*, or something from a dream which one might find entirely normal while dreaming but utterly bizarre when awake ... Cut to the Alligator Ladies, one wearing a nun's habit (*Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*), one sporting a spider-web design (*The Diabolical Dr. Z*) and another dressed like a cartoon witch (*The Demons*), dancing with Al Pereira dressed in a friar's robes (*Snakewoman*) and a mystery man wrapped in black fabric with a white bucket on his head (your guess is as good as mine). Round and round they dance and sing, by the side of a hilltop road in the blazing sun ... Cut to the same group dancing in an empty restaurant, sunlight streaming through the stained glass windows (a location used in *Mil sexos tiene la noche*) ... Cut to a beautiful lakeside mansion at the height of a summer's day, identified by Verdú and Montes as "the prince's residence". It turns out to be a hotel run by someone who looks like Al Pereira (played by Antonio Mayans) but isn't. The girls check in, but there's confusion over their booking, not to mention their actual geographical location: it seems they've gone on holiday to the wrong country. The man who looks like Pereira (but isn't) acts strangely towards the guests (like Mayans's maitre d' of the hotel in *Mansion of the Living Dead*). Verdú goes to bed but sleeps uneasily, before sitting up in sudden fright (like Christina Von Blanc in *A Virgin Among the Living Dead* or Lina Romay in *Macumba Sexual*). Her cue to sit up is a shout from Franco, off camera. Now awake, she hears a voice, echoing in her mind, cajoling her, threatening to kill her. The voice is still Jess Franco's. (How many more actresses, over the years, has he woken from uneasy slumber then cajoled into murder or madness?).

Glorious chaos reigns as we return to the restaurant location, and the cast dance around skittishly: a nun, a witch, a spider-woman, and a man with a bucket on his head. As the dance goes on, Pereira discovers that a gormless idiot who's been loitering around in several shots is none other than 'Sal Pereira': "*Oh my God, it's my son! It's a shame he's still an imbecile.*" Given Franco's own penchant for playing idiots (*A Virgin Among the Living Dead*, *Macumba Sexual*) is this a family reunion twice removed in a dream? Is Al Pereira now merging with the director's memories of his father? It might explain the animus towards the character, which Franco had never shown before ... Cut to Paula getting a massage from Irene. "*You have great hands. They almost feel like feet*" she says, casually rearranging the human body just as Franco is casually rearranging his *dramatis personae* and their reflections in the real world ... Cut to Jess Franco's living room, as seen in *Paula-Paula*. We're here for the reading of the will, Al Pereira's will, supervised off-camera by Pereira himself. Can there be any more doubt that Pereira represents Franco in this film? A man contemplating the

imminence of death, refusing to be cowed, preparing himself by playing the fool with it?

Can I keep this review going forever? There's plenty more to chew on: bizarre lines of dialogue, shifts between reality and fantasy, strange quirks of construction. But of course I have to wind things up, no matter how much I want to delay the inevitable. We're coming to the end of the last film by Jess Franco, so let's look at it and treasure it. You can tell that Franco suspected the party was over by the jubilant but silent 'end of term' dancing of the cast in the final scene (oddly reminiscent of the end of Lynch's *Inland Empire*). And true to fractured form, Franco gives us not one but three possible endings. The first is joyful and genuine, playful and sad, allusive and personal. Summation of the unsummarisable, conclusion of the unconcludable, conveyed with a quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. "*This is a story, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.*" Delivered to camera by Antonio Mayans, first in English, then in Spanish, plus an attempt at French which Mayans abandons with a grin when the words won't come. His corpsing triggers an off-camera prompt in fluent Italian by Franco himself, spoken with a playfully dramatic Italian accent. The quotation is repeated a few more times, by Franco and Mayans, with some characteristic variations: "*Told by an idiot, a son of a bitch*" ... "*signifying shit, absolute shit.*" Instructed by Franco to dance like the others, Mayans sways in the old fashioned way. Jess encourages him by singing a few bars of "Cheek to Cheek" ("*Heaven, I'm in Heaven...*"), written by Irving Berlin in 1935 for the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie *Top Hat*, and used in the final scene of Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) when the desolate heroine goes to the movies to escape her misery, having nothing left to cling to but flickering fantasies. Except now, even the digicam is about to be switched off ... The second ending is a casual moment of reality, just before the final credits roll. Jess turns towards the camera and says, "*Well – that's it*" ... The third ending is the comic coda remarked upon earlier: "*We've made Al Pereira look like a complete dickhead.*" A caption says "*Revenge of the Alligator Ladies – coming soon!*", but by the time this prophesy came true, Jess Franco – cine-maniac, creator of images rich and strange, the Prospero of pulchritude – had finally left the stage.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

The Tempest, Act 4, scene 1, 148–158

REVENGE OF THE ALLIGATOR LADIES

Spain, 2013

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Production companies

Manacoa Films (Spain)

Pellicules et essai (Spain)

Timeline

Shooting date (Franco's footage)	July	2012
Shooting date (Mayans' German footage)	June	2013

Running time

SP 'Cameo' PAL DVD	86m32s
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directors: **Jess Franco, Antonio Mayans**. screenplay: **Jess Franco, Antonio Mayans**. executive producers: **Ferran Herranz, Antonio Mayans**. producers: **Xabier Ciruca, Antonio Mayans**. music: **Daniel White** [as 'Pablo Villa'], **Ludo, Antoine and Thomas**. camera operators: **Fernando Barranquero** (Málaga), **Naxo Fiol** (Málaga, Madrid, A Coruña), **Víctor Olid** (Madrid), **Xabier Ciruca** (Berlin, Nuremberg, Munich), **Antonio Mayans** (Madrid), **Luisje Moyano** (Málaga), **Marta Paz** (A Coruña). editors: **Jess Franco, Dani Salama, Antonio Mayans, Paco Limón, Naxo Fiol, Víctor Olid, Manuel Yunta, Jorge Núñez**. art director: **Luisje Moyano**. production manager: **Antonio Mayans**. sound: **Adán Latonda**. sound re-recording mixer: **Santi Cerni**. digital compositor: **Jorge Núñez**. camera operator: **Marta Paz**. production assistant: **María Núñez**. Thanks to Fonofox, FKM, BUT Film Festival, KommKino, Werskattkino, La Abadía de Berzano, El Buque Maldito, Aída García, Carlos Atanes.

Cast: **Antonio Mayans** (Himself/'Robert Foster'/Al Pereira). **Irene Verdú** [as 'Debbie Logan'] (Alligator Lady 1). **Carmen Montes** (Alligator Lady 2). **Paula Davis** (Alligator Lady 3). **Luisje Moyano** (Sal Pereira, Al's son). **Jesús Franco** (the director). **Adán Latonda**. **María Kaltembacher**. **Víctor Olid**. **Vanessa Rivas**. **Marta Paz**. **Naxo Fiol**. **Fernando Barranquero**. **Francesco Cesari**. **Álex Mendíbil**. **Milo Robles**. **Carsten Frank**. **Margarethe von Stern**. **Andreas Bethmann**. **Uwe Huber**. **María Núñez**. **Toñeto Otero**.

Review: The closing credits of *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* had promised another Jess Franco film, "coming soon". Franco died before he could deliver on that promise, but his close friend and long-time associate Antonio Mayans stepped in to marshal the existing Franco material, suturing it together with freshly shot footage based on his intimate knowledge of Franco's modus operandi. The result, *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies*, is a many-headed creature: a farewell to Jess Franco's filmic universe, a continuation

of the Franco method by his closest associate, a rounding up of the last forty minutes of Franco material, a partial documentary, and a sibling for *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*. It embraces the reality-bending strategy of its immediate predecessor and uses it to reveal the Franco approach to filming, with scenes concocted on the fly to take advantage of happenstance. Like the previous film, it takes the route initiated by Franco's extraordinary *El sexo está loco*: a fictional construct is tenuously established, only for verité interjections and dreamlike absurdities to pull the rug from underneath it. Antonio Mayans deconstructs his own performance, picks up on the themes established in the first film (e.g. Al Pereira as religious misogynist) and adds to the melée a comic dramatisation of the real life family tensions caused by his appearances in Franco's sex-drenched films. The result is a beguiling simulacrum of Franco's cinematic universe: equal parts dreamy dislocation, droopy eroticism, reflexive game-playing and absurdist tomfoolery.

Inevitably, because it mimics and recycles so much, one is initially tempted to see *Revenge* as a footnote to *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, rather than a film in its own right. Certainly, to get the full effect *Revenge* needs to be viewed in the context of the first film. At one point we see an already metatextual sequence from *Al Pereira* incorporated into *Revenge*, a sort of meta-meta-reflection of the filmic process. But since Franco's films were always a riot of echoes and reflections and reiterations, it's hardly an alien concept. The provenance of *Revenge* – partially Franco's film, partially Mayans's – also helps to thwart the finality of *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, by giving the last few thousand metres of Franco's extraordinary filmography a suitably ragged quality as they exit from the projector. (Yes, I know it's shot on videotape, but allow me the luxury of a filmic metaphor!) It makes perfect sense that we should experience ambiguity and imprecision as we zoom out from the shoreline of Franco's world of images: closure, neat and precise, was most definitely *not* what the films were all about.

The footage actually shot by Franco (helpfully corralled into a sub-set called "The Jess Franco Cut" as a DVD extra) consists entirely of material filmed during *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*. We see Irene Verdú, Carmen Montes and Paula Davis (the latter referred to as 'Davinia' in the 'real world' scenes) cavorting on a table, licking and fondling each other, or giving Jess himself an eyeful of their sexy dancing. In other words, very much as per the previous film. This material looks to have been cut from *Al Pereira* for length, as it offers nothing substantive that wasn't already conveyed before. But that, in a way, is its charm. It's almost the same but slightly different, which means that we revisit *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* through an alternative facet, as though the film were a jewel which, when tilted this way or that, sends slightly different images to the retina.

The film begins as a documentary. A caption informs us that the dateline is June 2012, just a few days before shooting began on *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*. We see Jess Franco in the living room of his apartment in Málaga, working on the script with Antonio Mayans. The dialogue being written down is intended

for the character of Al Pereira (although it didn't make the cut). The camerawork and situation is entirely informal; one gets the impression that no one present was expecting this footage to appear in a film. Behind the camera, a man tries to attract Franco's attention, but Franco is too focussed on the conversation with Mayans to hear. Cut to a shot of Jess having breakfast at home, with Mayans, Irene Verdú and Paula Davis. From here we cut to him hard at work on an erotic scene from *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*: "I want to see both tongues. I haven't seen them yet," he tells Verdú and Davis. For those who imagine that Franco simply doesn't care about fine-tuning performances, we get an example of his attention to detail; Mayans, dressed in a conservative dark blue suit, is playing the scene in bare feet, for comfort. Despite the fact that his feet are not in shot, Franco insists that Mayans put on his shoes. He doesn't elaborate, but one imagines it's because he feels that Mayans, playing an uptight and religiously fixated version of Pereira, would get into the role more effectively if he dressed formally. We then see Franco feeding the actor his lines from behind the camera, each phrase spoken first by Franco and then by Mayans. It's a technique you might call 'instant scripting': there's no sense that the lines pre-existed. Franco is basically improvising the lines and then the actor reproduces them.

The next scene takes us to Berlin, where Franco is being fêted at the Babylon cinema. Forty of his films are being screened over a two-week period, from the 3rd to the 15th of August 2012. "I have been to Berlin many times but it has never been this special," Franco says to the camera. He sits at a street café with Carsten Frank and Andreas Bethmann, who present him with the German DVD releases of *Midnight Party*, *Countess Perverse* and *Celestine*. Uwe Huber discusses a recent Tim Lucas article with him, and Mayans signs a copy of Bethmann's Jess Franco booklet for Huber: "To one of my favourite 'freakies'". These scenes represent the warmth and respect with which Franco found himself greeted in the last few years of his life. After so many years being treated as a hack, a pariah, or an unwanted pervert, he seems delighted by the fervour of his fans. Cut to Franco's apartment again, and Mayans departs, kissing Franco on both cheeks, saying "I'll see you soon". "I don't believe you, but..." jokes Franco, as the scene fades to black. Cut to Jess on location for *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, singing an old Mexican song to the camera. "Shadows" by Javier Solís: "Shadows, nothing more, between your life and mine. Shadows, nothing more, between your love and mine. I would like to open my veins slowly, and shed all my blood at your feet, to show you that I can't love you more and then die." In terms of narrative structure, this is Franco's farewell; from this point on in *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies*, he becomes a dadaist 'found object', a piece of a collage, to be edited and juxtaposed by Antonio Mayans within the reflexive narrative that takes up the rest of the film. The song also functions as the only acknowledgement of the death of Lina Romay. Although nothing is said to indicate it, I believe that Franco sings this song, to camera, from the loneliness and sorrow of his loss. Perhaps, too, he sings it to all women, in the widest possible sense. After a career built on a

feverish obsession with women, this sentimental paean to romantic suicide is like a final testament to a lifelong adoration...

Everything in this first ten minutes, including the song that Franco sings, is presented as documentary: afterwards, we enter the hall of mirrors of a collapsing/reassembling meta-narrative. Mayans, in conceiving his new material, shifts fluidly between reality and fantasy, but he adds another twist: even within the fictional scenario, he flips between playing (1) Al Pereira and (2) a fictionalised version of Antonio Mayans, while the 'real' Antonio Mayans directs his auto-deconstruction and occasionally gets a namecheck in the dialogue! In order to avoid confusion, let's refer to these two versions of the same man as 'Antonio Mayans' (the inverted commas indicating the person whom we see in a fictional environment) and Antonio Mayans (the director who has staged these fictional situations for inclusion in *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies*). The bridge between documentary and meta-fiction is a sexy dance performed by Irene Verdú, culled from the earlier film shoot. For eight minutes we listen to music by Franco and Daniel White, and watch Verdú swaying her ass in slow motion, with digital droplets resembling snow cascading down the image. When we emerge from this erotic intermission we see Franco again, in his sitting room, speaking on the phone. At this point, however, we have crossed the line into a different reality. Franco's brief remarks on the telephone are taken out of their original context and intercut with a staged scene in which 'Antonio Mayans' agrees to be in Franco's new film, 'Culitos in the Night' (roughly translated, 'Cute Little Asses in the Night'). Mayans's granddaughter Yolanda (played by an actress) eavesdrops on the phone call and berates 'Antonio Mayans' for agreeing to be in yet more Franco 'filth': "You're a disgrace," she yells, "Those girls are sluts!" Jess, meanwhile (as seen through the time tunnel of *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*) is back in his happy place, shooting lesbian erotica in a Málaga conference room, while demanding (via a telephone call relayed to us second-hand) that 'Mayans' go to Germany to persuade actress Katja Bienert to be in the film. Thus 'Antonio Mayans' becomes an emissary or fixer for the production, as well as its leading man, which dramatises the real Antonio Mayans's role in the Franco family – he was simultaneously the star and production manager of the films Franco made for Golden Films in the 1980s. 'Mayans' flies to Nuremberg and Munich looking for Bienert, which adds startling production value to the film: we see images filmed from the window of a commercial airliner over Germany, with gorgeous blue skies and fluffy clouds, followed by scenic material shot in both of these German cities. Katja, however, does not turn up, so perhaps her offscreen answer was no (having been persuaded to appear in the godawful *Killer Barbys vs. Dracula* back in 2002, you wouldn't blame her if she'd sworn never to return to a Franco shoot). The beauty of all this is that Mayans plays 'Mayans' following orders from Jess Franco, when in fact this was all his idea! It's both a touching gesture of solidarity and respect to the deceased Jess, and a playful way of effacing his own role as conductor of this metatextual 'dance with the dead'.

What follows is the comic unravelling of 'Antonio Mayans', as he succumbs to hallucinations, paranoia and anxiety following a chance encounter with some Turkish protestors in the streets of Nuremberg. Convinced that "*The Turks, Katja Bienert and the entire world want to kill me*," he flees to an editing studio in Madrid where he informs his beleaguered editor that the German-shot material is dangerous: to include it in the film will result in him being hunted down and murdered by a shadowy cabal of Turkish radicals. In a panic, 'Mayans' demands that the footage be erased. The twist is that, thanks to Antonio Mayans, we've already seen the material earlier in the film! The more that one navigates the folds and switchbacks of this film, the more it plays as a cinematic joke about writing under erasure ("sous rature"), a concept first elaborated by the existential philosopher Martin Heidegger but picked up and extended by French thinker Jacques Derrida. In both Heidegger and Derrida, writing under erasure was physically manifested in the act of crossing out a word in a passage of writing but leaving it in the text: instead of simply disappearing, it is both present and absent, with the line struck through it diminishing its role but not entirely obscuring it. For Derrida, the visible mark of erasure does not signify a lost presence but the impossibility of any singular meaning attached to the word or term. This finds expression in both of the *Alligator Ladies* films, as the signifiers of 'reality' and 'fiction' contradict and undermine each other in a constant rug-pulling relationship. To this list of deconstructed concepts we can add 'identity', which is split in accordance with a performative notion of the self, where there is no single unity of personhood but simply a conglomeration of roles: thus Antonio Mayans the director of *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies* instructs himself as the star of *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies* to become 'Antonio Mayans' the paranoid production manager cum second unit director of 'Culitos in the Night' whose experiences we first witnessed as part of the film *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies*. Not only is 'Al Pereira' deconstructed, but Antonio Mayans too: the actor himself is written under erasure by the use of his own name to espouse evidently fictional conceits, such as the desire to remove footage from the film for fear of political reprisals. The contradictory presence of the very scenes 'Antonio Mayans' insists should be removed is another example of a Derridean play with the impossibility of singular truth or signification: the footage is simultaneously included and forbidden, and the person demanding its removal – 'Antonio Mayans' – has the same name as the man who put it into the finished work – Antonio Mayans. In a dizzying twist, even Mayans's regular pseudonym 'Robert Foster' gets a mention, as 'Antonio Mayans' rants: "*They can kill Al Pereira. They are also looking for Robert Foster. He played Al Pereira in this movie. And they are looking for the director because he was the one who said what the actor playing Al Pereira had to say in that moment.*" Remember, though, that in the scene with the Turkish protestors, Mayans is not playing Al Pereira; he's playing 'Antonio Mayans' who is watching a political demonstration while speaking on the phone to Jesús Franco. So where does 'Robert Foster' fit in? He gets top billing in the credits, after all. Presumably this is the

version of Antonio Mayans who speaks the lines given to Al Pereira, for instance when Pereira attempts to seduce Victor. So there are in fact three iterations of Antonio Mayans in the film: the director Antonio Mayans, the fictional actor/production manager 'Antonio Mayans', and the pseudonymous Mayans known as 'Robert Foster', who plays the character Al Pereira. Thus, fiction and reality in the *Alligator Ladies* diptych are irrevocably ambiguous, and in their relentless ambiguity they go some way towards offering a post-hoc explanation for the prevalence of fourth-wall-breaking shots in the Franco video projects. Video, with its surfeit of 'reality', its lack of transformative texture, seems to have triggered a breakdown of the entire fictional construct.

So what's new in this last meeting with Al Pereira? Having been taunted by the Alligator Ladies, who called him a maricón (fag), the perennial womaniser has decided to embrace this redefinition of himself. We see him cruising in a bar, and later making advances to a good-looking man called Victor: "*The Alligator Ladies have mocked and insulted me. They called me a fag. Fag Al Pereira, a sex symbol of all international detectivism. Many women have laid in my arms, and now they all bore me.*" Reaching out to touch Victor's hand, he adds, "*You have made me doubt.*" Well, it's certainly a well-crafted pick-up routine! In *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, the Catholic conversion of Al Pereira was part of Jess Franco's desire to depth-charge the foundations of his last remaining male icon, rendering him hypocritical and absurd (or as Jess himself said in that film, "*We've made Al Pereira look like a complete dickhead*"). All well and good, but the constant tossing around of the word 'fag' may have struck Mayans as a beast too far. In his reinvention of the character he sticks with Franco's characterisation of the Catholic misogynist but subverts the earlier film's insults by having Pereira embrace homosexuality. Of course, Franco put the word 'fag' into the mouths of the Alligator Ladies, who were trying to get a rise out of Pereira. But when the drift of Franco's sympathies is so concertedly in favour of the Alligator Ladies, and against Pereira, their ridiculous taunting (if you don't want sex with us you must be a fag, the lowliest thing we can call you) seems to have struck Mayans as unworthy of repetition. Thus, the seduction scene between silver fox Pereira and handsome hunk Victor, though it's played with a touch of humour (accompanied by that old Liberace favourite, Tchaikovsky's Concerto in B-flat Minor), is actually a subtle change of course from Jess's rather giggly and immature approach to homosexuality. *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies* is the first 'Franco film' in which mincing affectation and comical effeminacy are not the defining characteristics of male-to-male desire.

As for the title, one has to say there's a conspicuous lack of vengeance here. The Alligator Ladies themselves remain enshrined in the video caresses of Jess Franco: they neither seek nor obtain revenge. Did they even deserve it, given the events of the first film? After all, Pereira was the one made to look like a "complete dickhead", not them! Ah, no importa. It wouldn't be the first time a Jess Franco film title had fuck all to do with the film itself. Who, after all, is the incubus in *Incubus*? Where is the helter skelter in

Helter Skelter? What's so dark about the mission in *Dark Mission*? Whose shoes are spattered with blood in *Sangre en mis zapatos*? Why do the 'zombies' in *Mansion of the Living Dead* hang out in a monastery? What's so lonely about the path in *Camino solitario*, given that the hero spends oodles of time with his loving daughter? Where are the orgies to which Emmanuelle cannot confess in *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle*, a film entirely devoid of group sex? Where is the monster in *Kiss Me Monster*, and whom is he or she kissing? What do silent tombs have to do with the graveyard-shunning shenanigans of *Un silencio de tumba*? Where in God's name is the midnight party in *Midnight Party*? Chalk it all up to Franco's determination to avoid being defined (and the vagaries of retitling). In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall." Or Aldous Huxley: "Consistency is contrary to nature, contrary to life. The only completely consistent people are the dead."

So here's to Jess Franco, the guru of inconsistency. Thank-you Jess, for all the contradictions, strange afflictions, meta-fictions, gnomic in-jokes, leave-it-out jokes, bold confusions, fresh contusions, loose ends, dead ends, rear ends, zoom lens, mobius strip-joints, dubious standpoints, freak reverberations, astonishing crustaceans, unrepentant errors, ambient terrors, wily provocations, bloody irritations, childish antics, sex semantics, gleeful nonsense, blood and incense, parenthetical revolutions, psycho-erotic convolutions, dithyrambic detours, Sadean paramours, moody plot digressions, crazy jazz sessions, wandering out-of-focus, wacky anecdotalism, apoplectic flagellators, epileptic masturbators, farcical developments, vaginal envelopments, ad-hoc constructions, cannibal ructions, tangential asides, homicidal brides, chance agreements, shock treatments, talking assholes, sombre lost souls, red lips and bone-dry quips, oddball ellipses, Soledad gypsies, groovy serendipities, arty mirror-symmetries... the cinema of Jess Franco breaks the headlock of sense and replaces it with an endless spiralling pataphysics of eroticism!

Franco on screen: Jess appears as himself, signing autographs at a Berlin film festival held in his honour, and directing scenes for both *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* (in the documentary scenes) and for *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies* (within the fiction).

Music: Daniel White, Jess Franco, Tchaikovsky.

Locations: Málaga, Berlin, Nuremberg and Munich. The final shot of Pereira's son walking towards a sea-facing tower was filmed at the island resort of A Coruña, a port city on a promontory in the region of Galicia, northwest Spain. The tower is a Roman lighthouse known as the Tower of Hercules. Notice in the scene shot in Madrid, when 'Antonio Mayans' is running through the streets convinced that he's been hunted by Turkish radicals, he passes the Restaurante Pereira (situated on the Calle Cervantes).

Connections: 'Culitos in the Night' is a multilingual pun on *Gritos en la noche* or 'Cries in the Night', which was the Spanish title of Franco's first horror film *The Awful Dr. Orlof*.

Shadows

by Javier Solís

(translated by Stephen Thrower)

I would like to slowly open my veins
and pour all my blood at your feet
to show you
that I cannot love more
and then die afterwards

And yet your blue eyes
as blue as the sky and the sea
live closed to me
without seeing that I'm here
lost in my loneliness

Shadows, nothing else, caressing my hands
Shadows, nothing else, in the tremor of my voice

I could be happy
yet I'm dying in life
and living between tears
the most horrible voyage
in this endless drama

Shadows, nothing else, between your life and mine
Shadows, nothing else, between your love and mine

how short was your presence in my weariness
how warm were your hands, your voice,
like a firefly your light arrived
and banished the shadows
from my corner

And I was like a trembling sprite
without the blue of your ocean eyes
that have closed to me
without seeing that I'm here
lost in my solitude

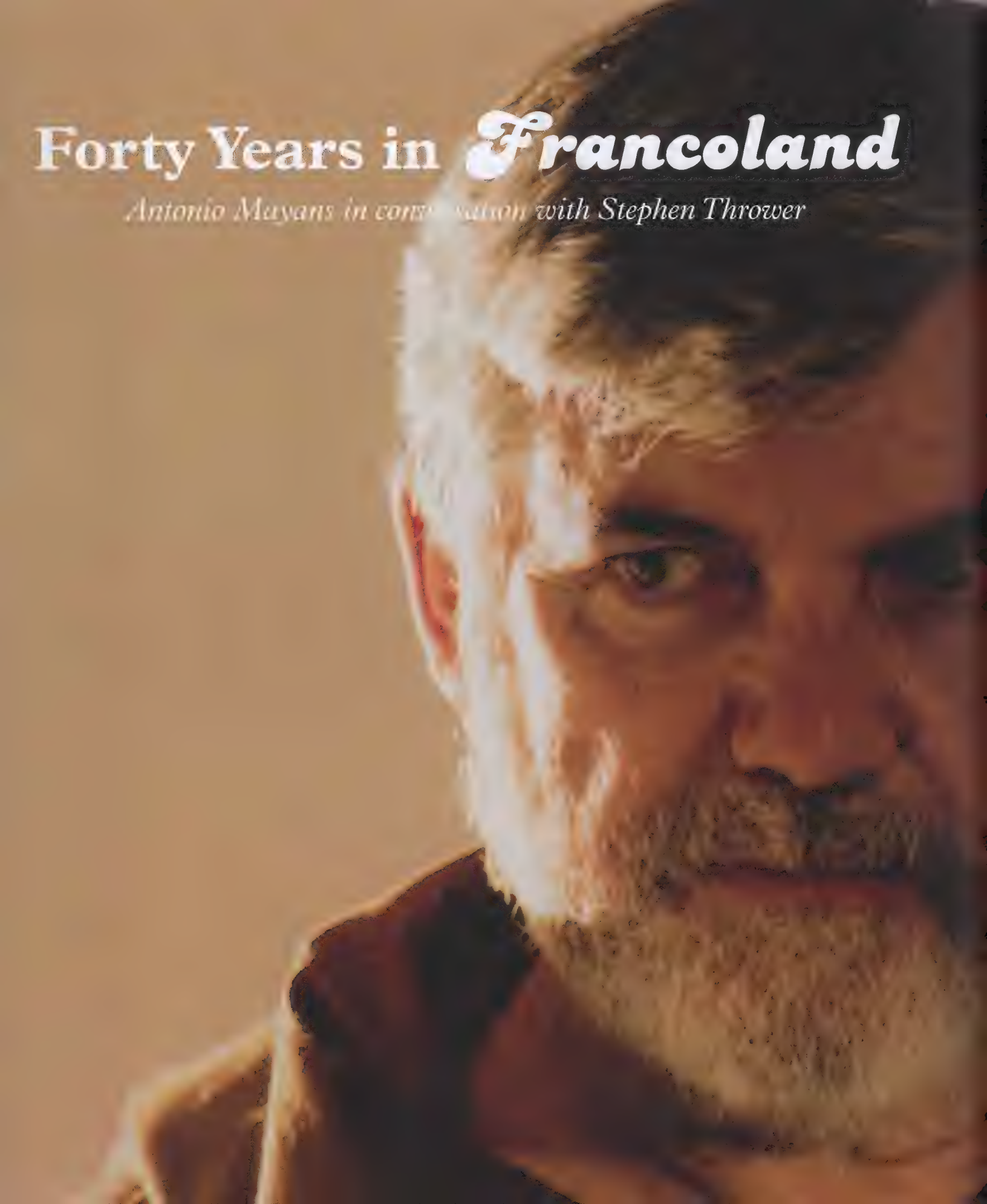
Shadows, nothing else, caressing my hands
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in this endless drama

Shadows, nothing else, between your life and mine
Shadows, nothing else, between your love and mine

Forty Years in *Francoland*

Antonio Mayans in conversation with Stephen Thrower



I first met Antonio Mayans when Julian Grainger and I went to Madrid during the writing of *Murderous Passions*, to view Franco's early film *Labios rojos* by appointment at the Spanish Filmoteca Nacional. Antonio agreed to come with us to assist with the negotiations and translate the film's Spanish-only dialogue. We got along well, and he regaled us with so many stories that I knew I had found the right man to shed light on Franco's work of the 1980s and onwards. As luck would have it, family connections bring Antonio to London quite frequently, which has allowed me to arrange numerous meetings for coffee and conversation. I also had the truly extraordinary thrill of accompanying him on a tour of the Spanish locations where he had worked with Jess Franco, thanks to David Gregory who invited us both to appear in a Blu-ray documentary for Severin Films. Antonio showed us Málaga, Torremolinos, Benalmadena, Orihuela, Villajoyosa, Benidorm, Elche, Alicante and Calpe, a dream holiday that felt as though we had stepped through the portal of the cinema screen into the living breathing universe of Jess Franco. This interview is the result of many such meetings, and could so easily have been twice the length, such is the sagacity, wit and frankness of Jess Franco's favourite leading man and most trusted professional collaborator...

How did you first meet Jess?

Well, the first film I did with Jess was *La noche de los asesinos* in 1973. I get a contract for four weeks to work on a film with Jess Franco. That's how Spanish films were made around that time, four weeks was the normal time for them to be made. Jess didn't see me beforehand, I don't know how he decided he wanted me but he had said 'I want this guy' without knowing me at all. I went there, to Orihuela, and worked for two weeks. The last day was a Friday. The next day, Saturday, we were going to shoot till three o'clock, and then go. Jess said, 'This one is finished. Antonio, tomorrow come with a white shirt and black trousers, no shoes, and a guitar, and we'll shoot by the pool'. *La noche de los asesinos* was a period film, a costume drama, but we were now going to film at a place with bungalows, by a swimming pool!

Not very 19th century!

Right! But I said okay. There were other people who didn't, one who was sharing a room with me; he said 'I've finished, I've finished, I want to go home, I'm tired of this'. He lived in Galicia. I said, 'Well I'm okay here'. So the next day we shot in this place, with me playing the guitar, by the pool, and then they were going to hang me...

So this was the film often referred to as *La casa del ahorcado* ['House of the Hanged']? One of Jess's unfinished and/or unreleased films...

Or 'House of the Red Something', or 'Red Castle', I don't know.¹ So we did that. Then the next Monday we were shooting with Dan Van Husen; we were going to shoot Dan in a discoteque, playing jazz. He was a man who played the trumpet. Then somebody would hit him with an axe and split open his head. Manole Punte worked on his wound for hours to make it look real. They placed the camera and they were going to shoot, when all of a sudden the producer of this film, Andrés Santana – who's a great producer now but was just a young boy at the time – said 'Stop everybody, go to your rooms, get changed, we're leaving!' We left the place at a run. Jess said we'll meet in Alicante, at the Hotel Pez Espada. So we went there, in different cars. Then he gave us directions to

a place along the main road from Alicante to Valencia. We stopped there, at night, and there's nothing around, nothing. Just a normal spot in Spain with nothing in the road, not even a gas station. We waited, and Jess came and said follow me. We took a dirt road until we got to a place called the Hotel Montiboli, which is beautiful, very Moorish, very strange and different. Built on a steep cliff by the sea near Villajoyosa. The Beatles had been staying there, during the time of *Abbey Road*. Jess told the hotel not to give any calls to anybody, no one could call their families. We stayed there and we started working the next day and it was another film. What had happened was, the producer of *La noche de los asesinos* [Arturo Marcos], who had hired us for four weeks, had found out that we were working on another film on his money...

And he was paying for two weeks shooting, for a film he would never see!

Of course! It was Jess's film. He was very clear that he wasn't going to give him this film. Why should he? This is Jess's film. He [the producer] had asked for a film, he'd given so much money for a film. So, you get your film, that's all you want, right? But you can't say, 'Oh, this is mine too.' I mean, what do you do on Sunday? You go for a swim! On the producer's money. Instead of going for a swim, we shot another movie!

That's quite a swim: Jess actually shot three films at the Montiboli! *Kiss Me Killer*, *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* and *The Hot Nights of Linda*. Something similar happened in 1975 when he was making a movie called *Mandinga*. He and Lina basically ran off together and left the cast and crew at a hotel, without paying the bills! Among the people they left behind was Lina's then husband Ramón Ardid, which I think led to the end of Lina's marriage. Did you ever hear about this?

One thing I do know. During the shooting of *La noche de los asesinos*, Jess sent Ramón Ardid off on an errand to Barcelona, and then they became lovers, Lina and Jess. Jess took that time – a week or two weeks when he'd sent Ramón to Barcelona – to conquer, or whatever you call it, Lina.

¹ Antonio Mayans in *Snakewoman* (2005).

So you think that Jess and Lina first consummated their relationship during production of *La noche de los asesinos*?

It's not that I say, or I think, this is one thing I know. I saw that they had become a couple in this film. I wasn't there when Ramón Ardid left, because I never got to meet him, or maybe I met him for one day but didn't know anything about him. But then he, Ramón, her husband, had left and Jess and Lina were sleeping together, in the same room and everything. It wasn't any secret.

Jess's money problems became quite serious around the time of *Mandinga*, there were bills mounting up which had been amassing since the Hotel Montiboli shoots. Did you see much evidence of this while *Kiss Me Killer* and *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* were being made?

On *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* (which was called *Camino solitario*) there was a situation. I remember Norma Castel coming down the stairs of the Montiboli in a rage, saying, 'I want my money, I want my money.' And Jess and the producer were saying 'You can't have any money because the money you were going to get was supposed to be given by this banker from Barcelona but he hasn't paid it to us!' He, the banker, was her lover, or whatever. They were a kind of couple, in the sense of a man with money, and a woman who's supposed to be beautiful but is a little 'used', because she was too old maybe, by then. I remember one of my scenes with her was that she's looking in a mirror and I'm holding her from behind and kissing her neck, and the problem was that I had to raise her tits to give her a cleavage, and it was very difficult because they were falling about everywhere [mimes breasts sliding down the side of his chest]. I had to have my hand *here*, and push *here*, otherwise they'd fall away!

There's a six year gap between *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* in 1973 and *The Cannibals* in 1979. How did you come to return to the world of Jess Franco?

I can remember very clearly when I met with Jess again because it was soon after my fortieth birthday, on 4th of May 1979. I was working in Madrid when I turned forty, doing a play at a theatre on the Calle del Pez. Two or three weeks later I decided to leave the play because they changed the pay conditions, they were going to make the production a cooperative and everybody was going to get the same pay. My price was higher than the cooperative price, so I decided to leave. I went home at the end of that week and on the Sunday I got a phone call from Jess, calling from Elche, saying would I like to come and work with him. He says, 'We're making a film here, I just arrived back from Brazil and we're continuing a film we were making in Brazil.' So I went down to Elche. It was June or July 1979. The film was *El escarabajo de oro*, but I don't think it was ever released.

Do you remember your first scene?

Yes, I was somebody arriving at a hotel where I had to check in. We were filming at the Hotel Huerto del Cura in Elche, the place where we stayed together. [Note: I stayed at this hotel with Antonio in January 2018, during the shooting of a documentary about Jess Franco for Severin Films. It's best known onscreen as

the central location for *Bloody Moon*.] So I stayed and finished that film, in one or maybe two weeks, and at the end Jess asked me, 'Where are you going next?' I said, 'I will maybe go to Dénia to stay the weekend with my parents.' Dénia is further along the coast, you see, maybe a hundred kilometres from Elche. He said, 'Do you have a telephone number there? I may call you.' I said, 'If you call me I'll be ready, if you don't I'll be going back home to Madrid afterwards'. So he says 'Good, good'. And on the Sunday evening he calls me and says, 'Come back, because we're going to do another.'

And can you remember anything about that next film?

Oh yes, well, first of all we had three weeks of rehearsals, talking about the character, where to get the emotions, and then after three weeks we started costume rehearsals...

[Realising Mayans is joking]... Oh of course! And this was for, what, *The Cannibals*, maybe? You really needed to get a grip on that tribal chief character! [laughs] But seriously, you can't remember for sure which was the next film? ¹

No, no.

As an actor, how did you respond to the casual way the films were prepared? Did it matter to you that there wasn't time for preparation or development of the characters, the roles?

One thing I liked very much about Jess, and it's the reason I worked so much with him, is that he left you to play the scene yourself. In *Los blues de la calle Pop* – why do I act as I do? As a detective talking to the camera. And I talk like in the old American films, a very tough guy. Because I was quite free to construct that character for myself. He would tell you very little. In that film he wanted to degrade the image, the light, using filters, making the top half of the screen red, or blue. I think what he wanted to shoot was maybe ten or fifteen shots in a film. The rest... he could have not shot. He liked shooting, but I think that he could have said, 'Let's not shoot this, because it's not interesting'. If he could have said, 'Look, I'm doing this film because I want to make these fifteen shots in the whole film. It was like this on many films. There's the one with a guy sitting down and looking through the window with the rain running down the glass...'

You mean the opening of *Juego sucio en Casablanca*? That's a beautiful shot...

Yes, it's beautiful, that's the one. He was saying let's make this film because I want to make this shot! And then there is another one, this Arabic place with the red walls, Castillo de Bil-Bil, and then the card game, I want to shoot this card game. Jess didn't take drugs, he only drank a little. He was a film addict. That's what he was addicted to. On *El hundimiento de la casa Usher*, all he was interested in, all that he would talk about or discuss, was the lenses: they had to be flat, very short, to have lots of focus like in the Gothic German movies. And when I say, how is the character? [miming Jess, he shrugs nonchalantly, then laughs]. We never talked about the character! I don't think he ever said anything special – maybe 'A bit tougher', you know, or something like that. Or 'Smile'. And for the rest, it was left up to you.

How did you know when you were doing something right? Did he communicate that to you?

I'll tell you this story. One day, Jess was praising a performance by an actor, someone who was visiting, not one of the regular people like me, and Lina got upset. She said 'Why do you never say anything like this to me?' And Jess was very surprised, and he said, 'But don't you understand that I am happy with you when I cast you in nearly everything I make? Why would I do it, if I didn't admire you?' This happened to both of us. I hadn't complained, but she complained, because we had talked about it, between us. She said to me, 'Oh, he never says anything nice to us!' I said, 'Tell him! And see what he says'. And then, when the three of us were together, we had this conversation.

It's nice to be praised for your work though, isn't it! I do sympathise with Lina's point of view.

Yes, but it's also like... He would shout at me, because he couldn't shout at the others. Which was a very good way of doing things. Because I'm also the production manager, so if I'm told that I can't smoke on the set (he never said that, because he smoked all the time, but using it as an example) it makes the others take notice. He couldn't say it to Christopher Lee, or the guy who was doing it for free and was lending us his horse or something like that! You can't shout at him, poor guy, so instead he would say to me, 'I don't like people smoking Antonio, put it out', or 'Antonio, be quiet!', when everybody's shouting. So he shouts at me and everyone pays attention and everyone quiets down. But I didn't take it personally, I knew what he was doing. I always mention a book I really like, called *The Horse's Mouth* by Joyce Cary. They made a film of it with Alec Guinness. I like it very much. That shows very much the relation between Jess and myself, as far as I am concerned.

Nicole Franco, Jess's wife, turns up on the credits from time to time, on some films through the 1960s and 1970s and three or four films around 1980/81, such as *Devil Hunter* and *Eugénie, historia de una perversion*. But she and Jess had split up by this point. Did she really do anything on these films?

No. She would come sometimes to the set and stay a few days, as a visitor.

How did that work? I mean, Jess and Nicole had divorced and Jess went off with Lina...

Yes, but Jess would send Lina to Barcelona or somewhere for a few days, and sometimes he was successful in sending her to another film for a while, and he'd be alone. And then we would shoot a film without Lina, with Nicole staying there with him.

So he'd stayed friends with Nicole?

Yes, but when you say 'friends', they stayed in the same room! I'm talking about when we were shooting, which is mostly when this would happen. But, I can't say what actually happened because I wasn't there!

So it was still intimate; a very close relationship?

Yes, a close relationship.

I guess Jess and Lina must have had an open relationship. Bearing in mind that the films are full of sex between Lina and other women! Could she go off and have fun on her own?

I never understood that. I mean, I understand open relations but... the thing was that Lina was so unsexy and so plain at home, she only became erotic on the screen. On the screen and around the screen. But not anywhere else. I heard sometimes that somebody would come and stay in their room a few nights, but I don't know.

It sometimes looked to me as though there was chemistry between Lina and José Llamas...

No. When I met José he had a boyfriend. A long-term boyfriend, they lived together and they were a couple. And then José later... do you know Jesús Vazquez? Maybe the most important presenter on TV, of the best shows in Spain. So José left this boyfriend and went with Vazquez, and they lived together and became a couple. All this is to tell you that José Llamas didn't have any interest in women at all! So I don't think there really was anything between José and Lina; there couldn't be. But yet, he was very good in porno films, because he did porno films.

How did José come to be involved in Jess's films?

It was through me. I met him when I was working in Madrid, doing the play at the theatre that became a cooperative. You remember that all of a sudden Jess called me in Madrid, exactly the day after I left the theatre company? Well, I had been working with José Llamas and sharing a dressing room with him for the whole play. My wife Juana and my children would come to the theatre to see me, and Juana became a very good friend of José Llamas. So I said to Jess, I have this friend and he's very good. And he *was* very good, and he was good looking and young. Juana and my three daughters were happy, because they were extremely close. He was like a son for us, or like the big brother of my young daughters.

Maybe what I'm picking up is Lina's attraction to him?

But as I told you before, she was this unusual person who had all this going on in the film, but I never saw her... [pauses] When Juana was the makeup woman, we were doing one of Jess's porno films and Juana was doing the makeup for it. She told me that one day Lina came in and wanted oral sex with Emilio Linder, who was in the same room, and she wanted to suck him off. Emilio didn't want to, he didn't feel like it. But I think this was still in the radius of the film, you see.

So in between shots she would still be carrying the sexual charge of her character...

Yes! That's what I would say. If she was shooting she was more sexual. Maybe she was doing that with Emilio to get him excited for the next shot! Maybe. That could be it. But I never understood her. After doing so many films with them, I never had any – normally I would have been, er, 'raped' by Lina, or by Jess, or by the two of them, they could have asked me, why don't you come to our room and we do this and that, or why don't you come with your wife, with your children, with your dog! (laughs). In that environment you'd have expected something like it. But never! Nothing nothing nothing. I can't say that it was offered, or tried. Nothing.

You mention the porno films. Did you enjoy making *Una rajita para dos*, or was it different?

When you see me working, in the sex scenes, I don't have an erection. I wasn't working in them on the porno side of things, I was playing a gay! But I couldn't do the porno. Finally we tried to do it – one day Jess says, 'I want you to try and do a porno thing', and I said 'Okay I'll try', but I couldn't do it! We tried to do the scene but I cannot get an erection in front of a camera. I've seen quite a few people with the same problem – they say yes, I'll do the porno film, and then when you point the camera they just can't. So I know I can't, because I did try. And José too, he couldn't really keep it up... He preferred men, but for the sake of the film he would do it. And besides, he could have problems with Lina. Because Lina wasn't very simpático. I mean, Lina was two people, and one of them was this woman who was at home with her John Lennon glasses and her knitting and reading, who is not simpático. We used to be together too much, all day long, because we were shooting and then we were editing and we were dubbing, and most of the time the three of us were together. And I never had a relationship... I mean, we were friends! We had to be friends! But otherwise, the roots weren't there.

Did Lina have friends away from film?

Not that I know of. Which is why I don't think Lina might have had a romance outside of Jess and the films. Although I could admit if you said she had sex with somebody outside, in another film, I would say 'Could be'.

You mean despite her sexual screen persona, she wasn't a person in search of erotic adventures in real life?

Not in real life, I don't think so.

Tell me about Lina's work behind the camera. She is sometimes credited as director on the hardcore films...

She did not direct. Even on shoots I didn't work on, I don't believe she ever directed. She didn't have the temperament. I think Jess said she directed so that she would get some kind of payment after his death, as he fully expected to die before she did.

What about her credits as assistant director?

Hmm. No, she didn't really do anything.

What about the frequent credits for Lina's brother, Joan Almirall, as production assistant or even director of photography?

Joan Almirall never existed. Well, he existed, he was Lina's brother, yes, but he never came to a set, or to a place where we were shooting.

Was Lina close to him? Did they stay in touch?

Not very much. At the funeral, the two parents came and I think he came too, but I never saw them, I never saw the three of them. I have seen the father and mother, sometimes. Very little, but sometimes. I have only ever seen Joan for a flash, very little. He had nothing to do with this kind of work at all.

For me, some of Jess's best work in the 1980s was made for the company Golden Films International, run by Emilio and Stella Larraga. How did you and Jess meet them?

I can't remember. I suppose he was looking for someone who could

work in a certain way. Emilio Larraga was working with José Luis Merino, who I worked with on seven films. He made good films, well, I mean he made the sort of films that you could sell and make money, but of course what Emilio Larraga should have done was to do what the Lesoeurs did, which was to have a stand at Cannes and sell in the Cannes Film Market. And instead of selling to the States or England or Germany, sell to Siam or Timbuktu, the little countries that nobody pays attention to because they can only pay a few thousand dollars or whatever.

It seems astonishing that they didn't try harder. Why do you think Emilio Larraga never tried to sell the films abroad?

Because he was an idiot. And he had a nephew who was a real idiot. Emilio Larraga was supposed to be a businessman, whereas his nephew was quite dumb, nothing going on. There's a difference between someone who's not brilliant, and someone who has no aptitude to be brilliant. Even if you put a light to him, he doesn't show up. And the nephew was supposed to follow in Emilio's footsteps, to be the inheritor of the business. Stella was the name of Emilio's wife, she was a monster behind him. You know, the wife who is always there, nagging, do this, do that.

Jess once said that she was the brains of the operation.

Yeah, yeah, she was the commanding one. Emilio looked like a businessman, round, fat, suit, the classic type.

Do you think the films were ever sold secretly, to somewhere like Argentina for instance?

They could have been, but Argentina and those places bought for very little, maybe one thousand to three thousand dollars, and then made copies for all of South America.

On a Golden Films production like *Macumba Sexual*, what would you say it cost to make, including dubbing and everything?

Between five and seven million pesetas, at the most. Paying everybody, and post-production. That's for everything except the prints.

And how many prints do you think would be made of a film like that?

Two.

Two prints? For the whole of Spain?

Two, maybe three? Very little, maybe even one! And they would send this one around and around. I would say sometimes just one, and maybe one in reserve.

So the films were getting released in Spain, at least for the first couple of years. I suppose some money must have been coming back in to make Jess feel like things were working out okay?

No, no, no. The only money that was coming to Jess was the money we were getting to make the films.

So he was surviving by paying himself a wage from the budgets?

Yes, but sometimes not even that.

He saw nothing from ticket sales?

Not from the Spanish boxoffice. He got some money from Lesoeur,



if they put some money in also, then with that we could make two films and sell one. Jess would get a given amount. How much do you need to do this film? In this case, Jess would do this type of thing, he would say I have a French guy who's giving me forty million pesetas, and if you give me two million we can make a film and we divide this film for us here and they keep the rest for France or Germany.

On average, how long did a film take to edit?

I suppose one week. It was all done at Arcofón. We would go there together. We did all the film editing and dubbing. We had a special room at Arcofón, a good sized editing room, we had it for ourselves because we were making so many films.

Juan Soler told me that on average the films took three weeks to shoot...

(Smiles and shakes his head.)

Less than that?

Yes.

How long would you say?

Well, I *should* tell you that they took three weeks or four weeks, but if I did... in one year we made ten films, which would mean that we had already spent at least thirty weeks shooting!

So let's take a film you remember well, like *Camino solitario*, how many days do you think that took to shoot?

One week. But if you ever wrote it down, Jess would have said I'm a liar! I could never say that because Jess didn't want me to say it. Altogether let's say three weeks, for filming, editing and dubbing. Sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less. Sometimes we were working on three films at the same time, and separating them out is difficult.

When you were working at Arcofón did you have a home in Madrid?

Yes, of course, I always lived in Madrid.

But when you were shooting in the south, did you also live in the south? Did you have two homes?

No, no. We didn't need two homes because we were moving all the time. You see, our *modus vivendi* was to shoot in the hotels where we would live. So we had to change hotels very often, so that we had new locations we could shoot. If you look at the films, we were always shooting in hotels. You can't go to a house; well you can, but after a while you have to start renting it because it's not easy to get permission to shoot in a house. People say yes, then they say no, and they change their minds, or it's not convenient, so it's difficult. But if you're shooting in hotels it's easier.

Did you always have to get permission from the hotel to shoot there?

Yes, and I was the one who had to do that, as production manager. I had to talk to them, and say 'I want to pay this' and refuse to pay more! We used the rooms, the lobbies, every part of the hotel. For instance, the Hotel Cap Negret in Altea, we used everything for *Los blues de la calle Pop*.

If you were shooting in the lobby, did that involve lights and equipment?

No, we didn't have all the paraphernalia, all the assistants, we were a small crew, we were not stopping the business so nobody would stop us or say anything. After a while they would. But it was a small crew, maybe two people would come with the lighting equipment, they are not credited but were part of the deal with the lighting company.

Did you have reflectors, that sort of thing?

We had reflectors, we had some lights, but very little. 850s, mostly. What we used was 525 ASA, instead of using the 125 ASA, which is a very high ASA, very receptive. We shot all these night scenes in *Los blues de la calle Pop*, the scenes overlooking Benidorm and all the scenes indoors, in very little light, and it worked.

So, the credited director of photography is very often Juan Soler, but as he has explained to me, he wasn't really the dp as such...

Yes, the director of photography was Jess. He was operating the camera, choosing the shots, and knowing and accepting the light.

So how would you describe the role of Juan?

He would measure the light, with the light meter, but Jess would say, 'Okay okay... 5-6', for instance, and Juan would say, '2-8' and do it. And Jess would say, 'No no you can't do that it'll be too hard', etc.

What about Enrique Díaz?

He was a camera assistant, very good, very funny, very active. He was in his twenties back then. I've worked again with him recently.

And Ángel Ordiales?

Ángel Ordiales would carry the camera on his shoulder, would change chassis, would have to take care of them. We would have reels of 300 metres and he would have to cut them up to make 150 metres – the chassis only holds 150 at the maximum. Eventually Ángel went away because he got married or something like that. He went to Paris and then died very soon after.

Enrique Lopez Casada?

He's in Bolivia now. He's doing very well. He has a production company making commercials.

I have him down only for *Esclavas del crimen*. Did he work on any more?

I wasn't in that, was I? I think he worked on others too. I think he was on *AIDS, Plague of the 20th Century*.

Francisco Beringola?

He was the other type. He was the assistant camera and was doing almost everything, focus puller.

The actual zoom, when it was used, Jess would be doing it himself, yes?

Yes, he would do it himself or maybe the focus puller would do them if they were complicated. If it had to be very exact because of the kind of lens we're using.

Looking at the two 'Bangkok' films, *Viaje a Bangkok*, *ataúd incluido* and *Bangkok, cita con la muerte*, why was one a Golden Films title and the other one a Manacoa film?

We did one for Golden Films, and with the money they gave us, we did another for ourselves!

So even on a tiny Golden Films budget Jess would still say, 'One for me and one for you'! Very cheeky...

Of course I could say it better, like, we hit a good vein, like when you look for gold, and it was going so well we made another! (smiles).

So a film like *Los blues de la calle Pop*, which was a Manacoa production, that was probably money left over from a previous Golden Films production, that was used to make a separate film?

Yes, more or less.

What went wrong around 1984, when the Golden Films period limps to an end?

There are two reasons, very important reasons. One is because we were making films for Larraga. We made thirty-nine films for him. And Larraga said he was losing a lot of money. To lose money he would have to have been an idiot, to invest with these people, us, who make you lose so much money, you must be an idiot! Of course he was making money, but he didn't want to pay. I was working with Jess in a special arrangement with no contract, we never had a contract, but Jess had a contract with Larraga who was going to give him a third of his income for each film.

In 1982, the filmmaker Pilar Miro became Spain's 'Director General of Cinematography'. She introduced a lot of changes to the way films were classified and subsidised. How did her intervention affect things for you and Jess?

When Pilar Miro came onto the Spanish scene, she made a law that said that every film had to be made with a minimum of thirty million pesetas, otherwise they wouldn't become films. You weren't forbidden, but you wouldn't get any assistance. There was state funding if you could prove that you had spent more than thirty million pesetas, which I think was a ruin for Spanish movies. Because we were making them for less than that, most people were, so they had to raise their expenses. Other producers started paying more for services, for hire, to qualify for assistance, which meant that when smaller productions were paying for services, or trying to get equipment hire, or location hire, people wanted more than they used to charge, because these other film productions were raising their expectations.

Let's talk about some of the films that have disappeared or were never finished. The most fascinating is *AIDS, Plague of the 20th Century*...

The Lesoeurs brought in a boy from the States, supposedly promising, he was supposed to be a very good actor, he was making a name in the States and was going to become a very important actor, and then the boy came and he wasn't anything like that. As far as I know – we never saw him again in any other films. Scott something... Looking at the names you have, I don't think it could be Bill Hoversten, but maybe? You could say any thing to get a producer interested: 'We've got Rudyard Kipling working for us in the next film, a very good actor, don't you know Rudyard Kipling?'

Was that film finished?

Yes, but then there was the flying saucer. And that was supposedly

going to be paid for by either Marius Lesoeur or Larraga. But there was nothing. In Spielberg's *Close Encounters* he made a fantastic saucer using just light, but no body to it, but it was a sight which did impress you. But we never had anything more than, you know, a dinner plate! The story was that AIDS had been brought to Earth by aliens. Supposedly this flying saucer arrived and captured a car in the fog, made contact with the driver, and they are the ones who spread the disease.

So the aliens abduct someone using a beam of some kind, take them to a spacecraft and infect them with AIDS, and then send them back to Earth to infect everyone?

Yes, it was something like that.

Who was the carrier?

I think it was this boy. He was the protagonist. But you have to understand, we didn't have a script or anything like that. It could have been a controversial story. All of a sudden we heard about apes and all kinds of things that are supposedly true, certainly a lot more true than this story! But yes, put in the market at a certain moment it could have been quite controversial.

What was the tone of the film?

It was serious.

Was it ever edited together?

Yes, yes, parts of it were edited for sure.

Another very interesting project that never came out is *Gentes del rio*...

I liked *Gentes del rio* very much, it was really nice. It was never finished. We didn't dub it. *Gentes del rio* and *El hombre que mató a Mengele* are the same: I mean, we made them together, more or less. One day *Mengele*, one day the other thing.

Do you mean that they were two films, two separate films?

They were two separate films.

So *Gentes del rio* is not an early version of *Mengele*?

Not supposedly, although it could be.

Was it finished?

No. We didn't dub it, and it was not edited. I don't think so.

How do you think Jess responded to becoming critically admired in his later years?

We were in Madrid, in this very special intellectual cinema, Golem, a very special cinema where they have all the French and Norwegian and Swedish art films. The intellectuals were asking Jess theoretical questions about camera use. Jess was answering, as you will have seen, he could answer very well in an intellectual way, when he was being serious. Then a man stood up and said 'I would like to ask something: why are there so many cunts in your films?'

Good question! (laughs)

And Jess said, 'Because I like them. Don't you like them?' And then he started a conversation with this man. 'I think it is a part of women that we don't see so much, but it is very nice because it has the equivalent of...' But he answered with the same agreeable reaction as when he was talking intellectually, he didn't think it was the wrong question. He was direct about it – he just liked them! And it's the same with the zoom. He just felt that the zoom

would give him the solution he needed for a particular shot, to get what he wanted fast. He could have done it better if he'd had a hundred metres of travelling camera tracks, with five curves and all that.

Do you think he would have preferred to use tracking shots more often?

No, I don't think so. Jess just didn't have the time to do it. That would mean we would have to shoot a single film in three months. Not less than three months, because if you have the tracks to lay out you sit around waiting while they're made ready. You ask the chief electrician if he's ready, and it's no no, not yet, dah-de-dah. You know that I worked in Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings*, and it took more than three months to do the film. And we had the ten kilowatt lamps which they had to carry on their shoulders with bars to support them, and the big camera, so it took ages to do one shot.

How did the last few films come about? I know that *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* was a project you arranged for Jess, to keep him busy after Lina died...

At a big sci-fi film festival in Madrid, just after Lina had died in 2012, Ferran Herranz came and spoke to me, saying 'I want to shoot an interview with Jess, and I have money.' I said, 'How much money?' He tells me. I say, 'Then why don't we do a film? With that money we can do a film instead of an interview.' So he came to Málaga with me and in Málaga we talked to Jess. And we started making arrangements for the three of us to be producers of this film, which would become *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*. And Jess said he wanted to do two, the second of which would be a *Paula-Paula* kind of thing, abstract, whereas I wanted to do a kind of *Camino solitario* sort of film. And he said, 'Okay I'll do two, one *Paula-Paula* and one *Camino solitario*.' And he said, 'I also have this one long film [*La cripta de las mujeres malditas*] which I'll make into two movies'. Ferran is a distributor, as you know, so he would take *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* and the two *Cripta* films, and make a release and sell them. Then they started trying to edit the *Cripta* films, but it didn't work because Jess was in Málaga and Ferran was in Barcelona. It was too difficult, and they stopped. By then they had already delivered the first *Al Pereira*. After Jess died, Ferran worked on the *Cripta* movies, putting in new music, making it more attractive for people, somehow. I've never seen it.

I dislike that film, for a variety of reasons. Mainly though, because it abandons any attempt to engage with narrative and simply presents two and a half hours of women writhing on the floor. Do you think Jess had grown disillusioned or bored with narrative altogether, towards the end?

He's just saying – 'I like cunts. And here they are. I realise I'm not telling you a story, but this is what I like now. Films don't have to tell you anything, you just have to admire cunts' ...

[At this point in our conversation we glance over at a table next to us, in the small café where we are talking. Two young women are having lunch together, and can hear our conversation quite clearly. Ever the gentleman, Antonio changes tack...]

... or pricks, or bridges, or towers, or koalas, or kangaroos. He's saying, 'Nowadays, I like kangaroos. And there you are.' Imagine, now he's old, and he realises that shooting the life of kangaroos would be exciting. So he writes a story about kangaroos – no, not a story, he...

Just films some kangaroos? Takes a video camera and films some kangaroos...

Yeah, having sex, eating, having their babies, meeting each other in the wilderness.

The impression I get is that, on *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, if you had not been there, wanting to make a *Camino solitario* type story, then he would have ended up making... another kangaroo film!

Yes. What I am doing there is influencing him into using this type of character who is absolutely amoral, and all of a sudden he feels that he's influenced by God and wants to stop all this...

One of the things I really like about those two films is the way that conversations that seem to be about the making of the film get pulled into the storyline, so the line between what's happening outside the film and inside the film gets completely blurred. Life is the film.

Yes, that's what I like about them. Absolutely. And it's the two of us, in a way, saying goodbye to each other.

I also like all the sequences where you can hear him prompting, giving you new lines to say. Is he making these lines up in the moment, and asking you to say them, or does he have it written down, say the night before?

No, not written down.

So he's spontaneously scripting the film in real time: rather than giving you a script he's giving you the lines one by one as they occur to him.

Yes, yes, that's it. That's all he was doing.

Did he used to do that before?

No, he used to write them down on paper, which I was given before a scene, then he would say 'action' and I would say them. I mean, more or less, because you can't retain a hundred words at a glance. You just get the idea and go.

When he was shooting *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, do you think that Jess thought this was the last one?

No, no. You have to remember that when *Alligator Ladies* was shown in public he was very happy. It was shown on a Saturday and I called him on the Sunday. I was at the premiere of *Alligator Ladies* and the audience responded very nicely. At the screening in Barcelona they had a rock band who played an interval in the middle of the film, which was shown in two halves. I phoned him and told him and he was absolutely happy with this. So I asked him, what should I say to them at the end of the film? He said, 'Tell them this is the beginning of a series of films that we are going to make.' That was the last time I spoke with him. That was at 3 o'clock, and at 7 o'clock he had the stroke. So he didn't think that *Alligator Ladies* was going to be the last film. He thought that it was the beginning of a series of films that we were going to make, and rule the world!



The Pseudonymicon

Jess Franco is famous not only for the phenomenal density of his output, but also for his extraordinary range of pseudonyms. Some recurred throughout his career; others were just fleeting one-offs. The following is a list of these pseudonyms, along with a record of their use and notes on their provenance. I have not listed all instances of 'Jess Franco' or 'Jesús Franco' – these are his most commonly used names and would fill too much space. Suffice to say that the first use of the name 'Jess Franco' is on 1968's *The Blood of Fu Manchu*. Bequeathed to the director by producer Harry Alan Towers, it was Franco's personal favourite, persisting all the way through to such films as *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies* (2012). Prior to that, his principal screen credit was 'Jesús Franco' (for Spanish releases) or Jess Frank (for French and some German releases). The first would turn up, with or without its wandering accent, as late as *Incubus* (2002). The latter (which Franco himself never liked) pretty much dropped out of the running after the Artur Brauner productions of the early 1970s.

The formal Spanish approach is to include both the father's surname and mother's maiden name, therefore Franco's full nonenclature is Jesús Franco Manera. He used this occasionally, principally for the Robert De Nesle productions, where it became his preferred screenwriting credit. The only other leading contender is the rather terse 'J. Franco' which turns up on a random selection of films, covering a variety of roles including director and actor, between 1965 and 1983.

I will be listing the specific international release title for each pseudonym, which is not always the most common variant. Space forbids constant reiteration of the more familiar titles! Also included are weird spellings and oddities from film posters when they occur. A final note: Franco and his producers often added names to the credits for quota reasons. For instance, Gerard Brissaud was credited frequently as cinematographer on the films made for Robert De Nesle, although Brissaud (a real cameraman) did not shoot a single Franco film. I do not count such instances as Franco pseudonyms, since they belong to real individuals.

Key: d = director s = scriptwriter/screenplay/story a = actor m = music dp = director of photography e = editor

Jess Frank: *Mariquita La Belle de Tabarin* (d) *L'horrible Docteur Orlof* (d) *Agent 077 Opération "Jamaïque"* (d) *Le Sadique Baron von Klaus* (d) *Sinfonia per un sadio* [poster] (d) *Le Jaguar* (d, s) *Les Maitresses du Docteur Jekyll* (d) *La spia sulla città* [poster] (d) *Lucky the Inscrutable* [Eng and German versions] (d) *Rote Lippen Sadisterica* (d) *The Devil Came From Akasava* (d) *Una venere senza nome per l'ispettore Forrester* (d) *X 312 – Flight to Hell* (d) *Allarme a Scotland Yard: sei omicidi senza assassino!* [poster] (d) *Der Tödesracher von Soho* (d) *Dr. M schlägt zu* (d, s) *Junfrauen-Report* (d) *Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen* [poster] (d) *La comtesse noire* [poster] (a) *Midnight Party* (a) *Justine* [1979] (a) *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (a) *Golden Temple Amazons* ("A Jess Frank presentation") (a). **J. Franco:** *Le Diabolique Docteur Z* (d) *Attack of the Robots & Cartes sur table* (d, s) *Fu Manchu y la beso de la muerte* (s) *99 Donne* (d) *Les cauchemars naissent la nuit* (s) *Las vampiras* (s) *El muerto hace las maletas* (a) *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* (s) *Un Capitán de quince años* (s) *La tumba de los muertos vivientes* (s) *Camino solitario* (m). **Jesus Franco Manera:** *Der Heisse Tod* (d) *Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht* (d) *Un capitain de quinze ans* (s) *Les Ébranlées* (s) *Le journal intime d'une nymphomane* (s) *Plaisir à trois* (s) *Les Croqueuses* (s) *Les Amazones de la Luxure* (s) *Le miroir obscène & Lo specchio del piacere* (s) *Una secondina in un carcere femminile* (d). **Jess Franck:** *Le Sadique Baron von Klaus* [poster] (d) *Exorcism* (a) *Female Vampire* (a). **Jesse Franco:** *Il Conte Dracula & Les Nuits de Dracula* (d). **Franco Manera:** *De Sade 2000* (a) *Vampiros Lesbos* (d) *Heisse Berührungen* (s). **Manera Jesús-Franco:** *Sexy Nature* (d) *Lo specchio del piacere* (d). **Jess Franc:** *Küss Mich Monster* [poster] (d). **Jean Franco:** *The Blood of Fu Manchu* [US poster] (d). **John Frank:** *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (d). **Jeff Franco:** *L'horrible Dr. Orlof* [poster] (d). **J. Franco Manera:** *Furia en el trópico* [poster] (d). **J. Frank Manera:** *Der Hexentöter von Blackmoor* [poster] (d). **Frank Manera:** *Downtown* (a). **Jesus Manera:** *Une vierge chez les morts vivants* (a). **Frañco Manera:** *Vampyros Lesbos Erbin des Dracula* [poster] (d). **J.F. Manner:** *Eugenia* (special consultant). **Jeff Manner:** *Les Cannibales* [FR poster] (s). **Jeff Maner:** *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (s). **Wolfgang Frank:** *Downtown* (d).

• By far the most common of Franco's 'true' pseudonyms (i.e. not based on a variant of his real name) is 'Clifford Brown'. First appearing as the directorial credit on *The*

Demons in 1972, and running throughout the Robert De Nesle period, it was revived in the 1980s for a handful of titles culminating in the 1985 jungle adventure *El esclava blanca* (with odd variants popping up afterwards). This was the first of Franco's 'jazz' appropriations: Clifford Brown was, in reality, an American jazz trumpeter who died in a car crash in 1956 at the age of 25. The group he formed with Max Roach (the Clifford Brown & Max Roach Quintet) played in the hard-bop style and won many admirers. Sonny Rollins joined the group in 1955 and together they recorded some of the finest and most influential music of the be-bop era. Interestingly, Brown was one of the few jazz pioneers to steer clear of hard drugs, and he avoided excessive alcohol too, a position which Franco himself espoused in numerous interviews.

'Clifford Brown': *The Demons* (d) *Un capitano di quindici anni* [IT poster] (d) *Les Ébranlées* (d) *Le journal intime d'une nymphomane* [all versions] (d) *Plaisirs à trois* (d) *Les Croqueuses & Countess Perverse* (d) *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* [poster] (d) *Les Gloutonnes* (d) *Célestine... bonne à tout faire* (d) *Lorna... the Exorcist* (d) *Les Chatouilleuses* (d) *Le Jouisseur* (d) *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses & Sexy A Go-Go* (d) *Confessioni proibite di una monaca adolescente* (d) *Cocktail spécial* (d) *Elles font tout & Quel certo sapore* (d, s) *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada* (d, s) *Devil Hunter* [all versions] (d, s) *Orgias inconfesable de Emmanuelle* (d, s) *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* (d) *Sola ante el terror* [poster] (d) *Sangre en mis zapatos* (d) *La esclava blanca* (d). **'Clifford Brown Jr':** *Red Silk* (d) *Helter Skelter* (d). **'Clifford Brown':** *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* (d). **'Clidford Brown':** *Sexy Diabolic Story* (poster) (d). **'Cliffor Brawm':** *Bangkok, cita con la muerte* (d). **'Terence Brown':** *Karzan contro le donne dal seno nudo* [poster] (d)

• The many-headed hydra known loosely as 'David Khune' had its roots in Franco's insistence that in the early 1950s he'd written pulp fiction under that name. However, as not one of these desirable volumes has ever turned up, despite the zeal of would-be collectors, one must assume that 'David Khune' marks the beginning of Franco's taste for self-mythologising – though always, it should be noted, in a light-hearted vein; the deceit was neither unsavoury nor delusional. In fact it must have been a source of amusement to Franco to come up with such a bewildering family of variants...

'David Khune': *Gritos en la noche & L'horrible Docteur Orlof* (s) *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* (m) *Exorcism* (s) *Sexy A Go-Go* [poster] (s) *Las últimas de Filipinas* (s). **'David Khüne':** *Le Jaguar* (s). **'David Kuhne':** *Le Diabolique Docteur Z* (s) *Un silencio de tumba* (m). **'David Kühne':** *Les Maitresses du Docteur Jekyll* (s). **'David Khunne':** *Les Demons* (s) *Los ojos del doctor Orloff* (m) *Les Chatouilleuses* (s) *Kiss Me Killer* (s) *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (s) *Midnight Party* (a) *Frauengefängnis* (dp) *Esclavas del crimen* (s). **S.I.D.A.** *La peste del siglo veinte* (d, s). **'David J. Khunne':** *Red Silk* (s) *Broken Dolls* (s) *Helter Skelter* (s). **'David Khunne II':** *Killer Barbys* (s). **'David Khunne Jr':** *Blind Target* (s). **'David Khunn':** *Tender and Pervers Emanuelle* (s). **'D. Khunne':** *La mansión de los muertos vivientes* (s). **'D. Khunne Jr.':** *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* (s). **'D. Khunn':** *L'ange de la mort* [dir: Andrea Bianchi] (s). **'David H. Klunne':** *Dracula contra Frankenstein* (writer of prologue text). **'David Kunne':** *Las vampiras* (m) *El muerto hace las maletas* (m). **'David Khunte':** *La calda bestia* [Italian production records] (s).

• Runner-up among the 'true' pseudonyms is 'J.P. Johnson' and his variants. As with 'Clifford Brown', Franco borrowed the name from a favourite jazz musician, in this case James P. Johnson (1884-1955). Johnson was a jazz pianist, highly regarded for having evolved the influential 'Harlem Stride' style of playing (he was known as 'the Father of Stride') and for his ability to improvise within the relatively strict melodic and rhythmic demands of the form. Johnson taught Fats Waller, influenced such luminaries as Count Basie and Duke Ellington, and is commonly regarded as one of the key artists to make the transition from ragtime to jazz.

'J.P. Johnson': *Female Vampire* (d) *But Who Raped Linda?* (d) *Tender and Pervers Emanuelle* (d) *Exorcisme* [X version] (d). **'J.P. Jhonson':** *Tierna y perversa Emmanuelle* (d) *Les Diamants du Kilimandjaro* ("une sélection de...") (d). **'L.P. Johnson':** *Le Viziose* [poster] & *Exorcism* [poster] (d). **'James Lee Johnson':** *Esclavas del crimen* (d). **'James P. Johnson':** *En busca del dragón dorado* (d, s).

Eurociné: masters of confusion

In the filmography of Jess Franco there are few more confusing and aggravating areas to research than the films made for Eurociné, a Parisian company run for many years by father-and-son team Marius and Daniel Lesoeur. Notorious for their partial or misleading credits, the Eurociné productions offer a quagmire of unreliable information. Pseudonyms are a particular problem; often the same names were used by multiple individuals – a massive headache for researchers! The credits for most of Franco's Eurociné films are blighted by this practice, which on the one hand conceals his real work and on the other hand leads to him being blamed for the dubious efforts of others. For instance, Eurociné boss Marius Lesoeur directed or co-directed a handful of films himself, not very successfully, using the pseudonyms 'James Gardner' (*The Mark of Zorro*, 1975), 'A.M.F. Frank' (*Une cage dorée*, 1976), and 'Richard Deconninck' (*Paris Porno*, 1976). Confusingly, each of these pseudonyms (or minor variations thereof) were also used elsewhere as directing credits for Jess Franco! Then there's the case of *Cecilia* (1983), which adds seventeen minutes of new material shot by Olivier Mathot (aka 'Claude Plaut') to Franco's non-Eurociné film *Aberraciones de una mujer casada* (1980). With typical Eurociné insouciance *Cecilia*'s dubious efforts to be "directed by Claude Plaut" – whilst with typical ambiguity (and grammatical carelessness) they end with the words "A Jess Franco's Film"! Mathot himself was a stalwart Eurociné actor who often worked behind the camera too, for instance as assistant director on Franco's *The Cannibals*. His pseudonymous directorial credits on *Cecilia* and another Franco film made in 1983, *Les Diamants du Kilimandjaro*, are somewhat excessive indications of the fact that he stepped in to direct extra scenes at Eurociné's insistence (he performed the same service, uncredited, for 1983's *Revenge in the House of Usher*). 'Claude Plaut' is therefore not a Franco pseudonym; nor is 'A.L. Mariaux', which is Marius Lesoeur's adopted scriptwriting pseudonym on *Cecilia*, with Franco's contribution corralled into the one-off pseudonym 'Pierre Torok'. And let's not forget that Eurociné were incorrigible when it came to chopping up great big chunks of Franco's footage and adding it to films by other directors! (See Filmography Part 3). The following instances *alone* are cases where Eurociné's all-purpose pseudonyms genuinely represent Jess Franco:

'**A.M. Frank**': *The Oasis of the Zombies* (d) *Cellules du punishment* (d). '**James Gardner**': *Midnight Party* (d). '**James Gartner**': *Golden Temple Amazons* (d). [The latter is an unfinished Franco film originally called *Tundra y el templo del sol*, with additional material directed by Alain Payet; it is therefore unclear whether 'James Gartner' represents Franco, Payet, or the mastermind behind it all, Marius Lesoeur!] '**Rick Deconinck**': *La felicità nel peccato* (d). '**Rick Deconninck**': *Women Behind Bars* (d). ['Deconinck' is a Belgian or Dutch surname, a variant of which belongs to regular Franco actor and friend Richard De Conninck (aka Bigotini). As was the habit at Eurociné, the name also found its way onto Franco's film credits (in variant spellings) as a pseudonym for the director.] '**Dan L. Simon**': *Shining Sex* (d). '**Dan Simon**': *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties* (d). [Marius Lesoeur's son Daniel worked frequently on Eurociné films in various production capacities. The pseudonyms 'Dan Simon' and 'Dan L. Simon' (drawn from his full name, Daniel Simon Lesoeur) were used on these two occasions to represent Franco.]

• The obscure pseudonym 'Roland Marceignac' has no real-world provenance outside of its use on three films Franco made with Eurociné; in fact there appear to be no other Marceignacs anywhere in the world. There is a 'Soledad Marceignac' in Carl Andersen's *Mondo Weirdo* (1990) but this was in a film packed with blatant homages to Franco's work.

'**Roland Marceignac**': *Kiss Me Killer* [all versions] (d) *Sweet Pornobaby* (d). '**R. Marceignac**': *Kiss Me Killer* (s) *Women Behind Bars* (s). '**Roland Bourriquet**': *Kiss Me Killer* aka *La calda bestia* [IT online database] (d), *La coccolona* (s).

Candy and Lulú – These pseudonyms were used in two distinct ways: as the names under which Lina Romay acted in a number of hardcore and 'S' certificate films made between 1981 and 1986, and as the directorial credit for some of these titles. Although the films in question are sometimes attributed to Lina Romay as director, and Franco often attempted to distance himself from them, they were in fact directed by Franco himself, definitely not by Romay (see Antonio Mayans interview). I list here only those instances where 'Candy Coster' and 'Lulu Laverne' appear as pseudonyms for Franco as writer/director. In addition there is one instance of the name 'Rosa Almirall' being used as a Franco directorial credit. This is derived from Lina Romay's real name, Rosa Maria Almirall. However, as in the case of 'Candy Coster', despite claims that it represents a solo directorial effort by Lina Romay, it actually relates to a film directed solely by Franco.

'**Candy Coster**': *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* (d) *Un pito para tres* (d) *El ojeté de Lulú* (d) *Para las nenas... leche calentita* (d, s) *Las chuponas* (d, s). '**Rosa Almirall**': *Las chicas del tanga* (d). '**Lulu Laverne**': *Entre pitos anda el juego* (d) *El miron y la exhibicionista* (d, s), *El chupete de Lulú* (d, s) '**Lulu La Verne**': *Una rajita para dos* (d). '**L.L. Laverne**': *Phollastia* (s).

Rarities and one-offs

Walter Alexander': [derivation unknown] *Il diabolico Dott. Satana* [IT poster] (d) *El Horrible Dr. Orloff* [ARG poster] (d). '**Betty Carter**': [derived from the American jazz singer known for her 'scat' and improvisational abilities] *Phollastia* (d). '**Terry De Corsia**': [derivation unknown: possibly Ted de Corsia, American actor of the 1940s and 50s] *Phalo Crest* (dp) *Phollastia* (dp). '**Raymond Dubois**': [derived from a make of French saxophone] *Women Behind Bars* (e). '**Chuck Evans**': *Phollastia* (s). [This name appears alongside 'L.L. Laverne' as co-scriptwriter; it seems likely that it represents Franco, with L.L. Laverne representing Romay; bear in mind, however, that the reverse is possible too!] '**Jack Griffin**': [derived from *The Invisible Man* (1933) starring Claude Rains as 'Jack Griffin'] *Linda* (d). '**Lennie Hayden**': [probably derived from Lennie Hayton, a jazz pianist turned composer for MGM, married to blacklisted jazz singer Lena Horne] *Phalo Crest* (d). '**Fritz Hammer**': [derivation unknown] *Paroxysmus Erotico* (d). '**Frank Hollmann**': [derivation unknown – according to Alain Petit's *Manacora Files*, Franco disliked this name, which was foisted on his films by Artur Brauner] *Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen* (d) *Sie Tötete in Ekstase* (d). '**Pierre Torok**': [derivation unknown] *Cecilia* (s). '**Dave Tough**': [American jazz drummer of the 1930s] *Juliette 69 & Justine* [d]. '**Joan Vincent**': [derivation unknown] *Female Vampire* (e). '**Robert Zinnermann**': [derivation unknown, unless a nod to Bob Dylan!] *James Clint Sfida Interpol* (d).

Special cases

Hans Billian is credited onscreen as director of Franco's *Paroxysmus* (the Italian version of *Venus in Furs*), Billian was a German director of more than forty films and TV shows between 1963 and 1996. '**Pablo Villa**' is an example of Jess Franco voluntarily sharing a pseudonym, in this case with his close friend the composer Daniel White. Many times, 'Pablo Villa' refers to White alone, although as Franco explained to me when I met him in 2010, the name could also refer either to the two of them in collaboration, or to Franco alone. The latter was the case in *Macumba Sexual*, *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, and *El siniestro Dr. Orloff*. '**Manfred Gregor**', a name which turns up as Franco's directorial credit on *Porno Shock* (the Italian release of *Midnight Party*) was – in every other instance – reserved for the scriptwriting credits of Swiss sex film entrepreneur Erwin C. Dietrich, who was in some way financially involved in this murky Eurociné project. '**Michael Thomas**' is another regular Dietrich pseudonym, which was used in place of Franco's name on the poster art for *Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel* and *In 80 Betten um die Welt*.

Incorrect or doubtful IMDb credits

'David J. Khune' did not write *Broken Dolls* or *Red Silk* – it's 'David J. Khunne'. The only instance of 'Lulú Laverne' being credited with the accent, according to IMDb, is in the film *El chupete de Lulu*. Having viewed this film I can confirm that this is not the case; the credits are in capitals, as they are on all the Fevi films, and the name 'Lulu' does not include the accent. 'Juan G. Cabral' is listed as Franco's pseudonym for his performance as the hotelier in *Macumba Sexual*. However this is a supposition based on the brevity of the cast-list; there are in fact two male actors the name could refer to, Franco and one other. 'Dennis Farnon' is alleged by some sources to be a Franco pseudonym, with a sole credit – the music on *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido*. However the score for this ultra-low budget film is an expensive (and maddeningly familiar) orchestral arrangement, probably 'borrowed' from somewhere, and certainly *not* written by Franco. 'Preston Quaid' is one of two writers credited on *Phalo Crest*; the other is 'Lowel Richmond'. IMDb credits both as Franco pseudonyms. I think that even Franco might have hesitated to credit himself as two pseudonymous writing partners on the same film! And as there is no way to prove which of the two he is meant to be, the question is undecidable... The onscreen credit for 'P. Querut' as editor of *Female Vampire* is not a Franco pseudonym. While it is true that Franco should receive sole credit for editing the film, the existence of the real Pierre Querut as both actor in *Female Vampire* and head of its Belgian co-production company, Brux Inter Film, indicates that Franco was modestly putting a colleague's name on the credits rather than taking it as a pseudonym. Finally, I could find no trace of a 'B.F. Johnson', 'Jeff Frank', 'J. Franck Manera', 'Toni Falt', 'Frank Hollman' or 'Frarik Hollmann' with those precise spellings; perhaps they appear on rare posters or artwork?

FOOTNOTES

Julietta 69

1. E-mail interview conducted in 2004 by “Damianaka Kriminal”, questions by Robert Monell.
2. Franco told it differently to Alex Mendibil in 2009: “When I did the first cut I wasn’t satisfied so I quit,” he said, adding, “Lina was terrific, but the movie was very poorly managed.” <https://franconomicon.wordpress.com/2009/10/30/franconomicon-interviews-uncle-jess-english-version/>
3. It should also be noted that the subtitles at this point say ‘Caudenzi’, but it sounds to me as if D’Amato himself says “Gaudenzi”; I think it’s safe to assume that he’s referring to his regular collaborator at that time, Franco Gaudenzi, head of Flora Film, who was the producer of two ‘sexy mondo’ movies signed by D’Amato in 1978-79, Notti porno nel mondo and Le notti porno nel mondo n° 2.
4. Prestige Film was an Italian company set up by Erwin C. Dietrich and run by Maria Grazia Frigerio. Dietrich had launched the company in the late 1960s to release his Swiss/German softcore sex films in Italy, including Die Neffen des Herrn General (as Il paradiso dei nudisti), Champagner für Zimmer 17 (as Gatta pericolosa), Ich – Ein Groupie (as Sesso a domicilio), Die Stewardessen (as Le hostess), Eine Armee Gretchen (as Fraulein in uniforme), and many more. Prestige also handled the Italian releases of Franco’s Midnight Party (as La coccolona) and Shining Sex (as Piaceri erotici di una signora-bene).
5. Mattei was co-writer on Emanuelle e Françoise (Le sorelline) (1975), editor on Eva nera (1976), editor/co-director on Notti porno nel mondo (1977), and editor/co-director on Emanuelle e le porno notti nel mondo n. 2 (1978).
6. Sex Star System #13, 1976, by ‘Jérôme Fandor’ aka Jean-Pierre Bouyxou.
7. <https://franconomicon.wordpress.com/2009/10/30/franconomicon-interviews-uncle-jess-english-version/>
8. Monica Swinn, from an e-mail to the author, May 2018.

Midnight Party

1. “The Manacoa Files”, in a section titled “Mes années Franco”.
2. The Manacoa Files: Interview conducted by Petit on the 11th of June 1994.
3. “Interview: Swiss Exploitation Producer Erwin C. Dietrich on Jess Franco, Klaus Kinski and More” by Chris Alexander, at www.comingsoon.net – retrieved 15 January 2018.

Shining Sex

1. “The Manacoa Files”, in a section titled “Mes années Franco”.
2. Monica Swinn, from an e-mail to the author, January 2018.
3. Questions set by Francesco Cesari for Alain Petit on the Latarnia Forum, 29 March 2004.

Une cage d’orée

1. From the documentary Eurociné 33 Champs Élysées: a French Exploitation Cinema (2013)

directed by ‘Christopher M. Beer’ (aka Christophe Bier).

Barbed Wire Dolls

1. Jess Franco speaking to Alain Petit in Paris, 11th and 12th June 1994, as reported in “The Manacoa Files”.
2. Erwin Dietrich, quoted in “Ripping Yarn: Legendary producer Erwin C. Dietrich backed Franco, calmed Kinski and made a masterpiece in the process” by Chris Alexander, Delirium Magazine #6, 2015.
3. Alain Petit, in an e-mail to the author, April 2013.
4. Dietrich speaking in “Erwin Dietrich: Hommage an Jess Franco’s ‘Jack the Ripper’”, a documentary on the Ascot-Elite Jack the Ripper Blu-ray and DVD.
5. Agreement between Erwin Dietrich (Elite Films A.G.) and Jess Franco (Manacoa Films, P.C.), signed on 12 August 1975. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
6. Monica Swinn, from an e-mail to the author, November 2016.
7. Dietrich speaking in “Erwin Dietrich: Hommage an Jess Franco’s ‘Jack the Ripper’”...
8. *ibid.*
9. From an undated letter from Jess Franco to Anna Crognale Hansen, which was sent by Ms. Hansen along with her letter to Erwin Dietrich, dated 22 October 1975. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
10. From a letter 23 September 1975, headed “Summary of a meeting between Jess Franco and Erwin Dietrich, signed by Ramon Ardid.” From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
11. This agreement (23 September 1975) was in fact signed on Franco’s behalf by Ramón Ardid, then considered an employee of Manacoa Productions and referred to in the contract as the director’s plenipotentiary – a person having full power to take independent action on behalf of another. It’s possible that Franco deliberately avoided signing this contract personally because of how incriminating it was.
12. Monica Swinn, interviewed in Sex Stars System #17, September 1976.

Women Behind Bars

tbc
tbc
tbc
tbc
tbc
tbc
tbc
tbc

Downtown

1. Monica Swinn, from an e-mail to the author, November 2016.

Die Marquise von Sade

1. Monica Swinn, interviewed in Obsession.
2. Agreement between Erwin Dietrich (Elite Films A.G.) and Jess Franco (Manacoa Films, P.C.), signed on 15 September 1975. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
3. Letter from Erwin Dietrich to Anna Hansen of B.O.S. Co. Ltd. dated 24 September 1975. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
4. Letter from Erwin Dietrich to Jess Franco dated 4 November 1975. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
5. Letter from Erwin Dietrich to Jess Franco dated 15 January 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
6. Letter from Marius Lesoeur to Erwin Dietrich, dated 2 September 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
7. Letter from Erwin Dietrich to Marius Lesoeur, 6 September 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
8. Monica Swinn, from an e-mail to the author, January 2018.

Mandinga

1. Erwin Dietrich interviewed by Sven Berndt and Thomas Schweer, published in Obsession.
2. *ibid.*
3. Uwe Huber, from an e-mail to the author.
4. It should be noted that according to Lina Romay (in The Lina Romay File: Collins/Greaves, 1996), “Ramon worked with us on and off until 1980 or so.”
5. Erwin Dietrich interviewed by Sven Berndt and Thomas Schweer, published in Obsession (1993).
6. Jess Franco interviewed by Marian D. Botulino, at <http://film.terrorverlag.de/events/franco/index.htm>
7. Letter from Jess Franco and S.E.F.I. Cinematografica S.R.L. (Società Europea Films Internazionali) to Elite Film, dated 3 January 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
8. Note signed by Jess Franco, dated 18 March 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.
9. Note signed by Jess Franco, dated 19 March 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.

L’assassin portait des bas noirs

1. Letter from Anna Hansen to Erwin Dietrich, dated 22 October 1975. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber

and Guiskard Oberparleiter.

2. Letter from Jess Franco to Enrico Colombo dated 13 August 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.

Weisse Haut auf schwarzen Schenkeln

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Marian D. Botulino, at <http://film.terrorverlag.de/events/franco/index.htm>

In 80 Betten um die Welt

1. Letter from Erwin Dietrich to Jess Franco, dated 26 March 1976. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.

Jack the Ripper

1. Erwin Dietrich, speaking on the Ascot-Elite's Jack the Ripper Blu-ray and DVD commentary.

2. Jess Franco interviewed by Marian D. Botulino, at <http://film.terrorverlag.de/events/franco/index.htm>

3. Peter Baumgartner, interviewed by Uwe Huber for the DVD featurette "Peter Baumgartner, Filmkameramann" on the DVD release of Erwin C. Dietrich's *Die Nichten der Frau Oberst*.

4. *ibid.*

5. Roger Ebert, reviewing Werner Herzog's *My Best Fiend*, 11 February 2000: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/my-best-fiend-2000>

6. Klaus Kinski interviewed in *Ciné-Girl* magazine, January 1977.

7. Erwin Dietrich, speaking on the Ascot-Elite's Jack the Ripper Blu-ray and DVD commentary.

8. Jess Franco interviewed by Hans D Furrer, for *Vampir Magazine* #14, December 1976.

9. *ibid.*

10. *ibid.*

11. Representations No. 20, Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy (Autumn, 1987), pp. 25-76: "Shakespeare's will: The Temporality of Rape" by Joel Fineman.

Ilsa the Wicked Warden

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Hans D. Furrer, for *Vampir Magazine* #14, December 1976.

2. Dyanne Thorne, speaking on Anchor Bay's *Ilsa the Wicked Warden* DVD commentary.

3. "Dyanne Thorne: Mistress of Exploitation" – interviewed by Stebe Swires in *Gorezone* #19, Autumn 1991.

4. Dyanne Thorne, from the DVD commentary on the Anchor Bay release of *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden*.

5. Dyanne Thorne interviewed by Fabian Paffendorf, at http://www.wicked-vision.com/artikel/DyanneThorne/e_interview.php

6. *ibid.*

Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Hans D Furrer, for *Vampir Magazine* #14, December 1976.

2. Werner Zeidler, interviewed in the article "Susan Hemingway: Einziges Kostüm – nackte Haut!" Unfortunately the source of this interview is unknown. It was passed to me as a news cutting with no indication of the magazine from which it came. Judging by the nude picture that accompanies the feature, it was a sex magazine of some sort, possibly one that concentrated on movies. Comments about Hemingway retiring from the movies suggest the year of publication was some time in 1979 or 1980

(Hemingway made two films with Franco in 1979).

Blue Rita

1. Papers from the solicitors Dr. Iur. Max Kimche, acting on behalf of CCC Filmkunst, dated 11 February 1977. From the Erwin C. Dietrich archives, made available to the author by Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter.

Wicked Women

1. Monica Swinn, from an e-mail to the author, December 2016.

Women of Cellblock 9

1. Erwin Dietrich, speaking on the Ascot-Elite's Jack the Ripper Blu-ray and DVD commentary.

2. Jess Franco interviewed by Marian D. Botulino, at <http://film.terrorverlag.de/events/franco/index.htm>

3. From the BBFC's written archives, as seen by the author.

Cocktail spécial

1. From an interview with the author conducted in 2010, included in *Murderous Passions*.

2. *ibid.*

Je brûle de partout

1. Brigitte Lahaie, interviewed by 'Shimano' for the Nanarland website: <http://www.nanarland.com/interview/interview-brigitte-lahaie-.html>

Ópalo de fuego

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Carlos Tejeda in 2006, published in number 11 of *Kane3* (September-October 2006).

2. Jess Franco interviewed by Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher in 1996, published in *European Trash Cinema Special* #1 Jess Franco.

The Sadist of Notre Dame

1. Jess Franco speaking on the Synapse DVD commentary of *Exorcism*.

2. *ibid.*

El escarabajo de oro

1. Quoted by Alain Petit in his book *Jess Franco ou les prosperites du Bis*.

The Cannibals

1. Jess Franco, interviewed on the Severin DVD of *Cannibal Terror*.

2. Alain Deruelle, from an e-mail to the author, June 2017.

3. Al Cliver, from an e-mail to the author, August 2017.

El sexo está loco

1. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

Devil Hunter

1. Jess Franco, interviewed for Severin's DVD/Blu-ray of *Devil Hunter*.

2. Not to be confused with the other Franco *Prosperities*.

3. Jess Franco interviewed by Marian D. Botulino, at <http://film.terrorverlag.de/events/franco/index.htm>

4. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

Eugénie historia de una perversión

1. From an interview with the author conducted in 2010. The entire interview can be found in the first volume of this book, *Murderous Passions*.

2. Note: Antonio Mayans and Juan Soler say that Romay's brother did not work on the films.

3. Katja Bienert, from an interview conducted by the author in 2011.

4. *ibid.*

5. Brooke Shields interviewed in 2014 by The Daily

Telegraph's Celia Walden. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/11279436/Brooke-Shields-I-stuck-up-for-mum-but-now-I-want-a-say.html>

6. Andreas Bethmann interviewing Katja Bienert, 1999: <http://www.wicked-vision.com/artikel/KatjaBienert/interview.php>

7. Katja Bienert, from an interview conducted by the author in 2011.

8. Quoted by Alain Petit in his book *Jess Franco ou les prospérités du Bis*.

Kalt wie eis

1. Katja Bienert, from an interview conducted by the author in 2011.

Sadomania

1. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

2. Jess Franco, speaking on the Blue Underground DVD commentary track for *Sadomania*.

3. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

4. Jess Franco, speaking on the Blue Underground DVD commentary track for *Sadomania*.

Bloody Moon

1. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

Linda

1. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

2. José Miguel García Marfa, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

El lago de las vírgenes

1. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

Macumba Sexual

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher in 1996, published in *European Trash Cinema Special* #1 Jess Franco.

2. *ibid.*

Oasis of the Zombies

1. From "The Mansion Jess Built" on the Severin DVD of *Mansion of the Living Dead*.

Mansion of the Living Dead

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Hans D. Furrer, for *Vampir Magazine* #14, December 1976.

2. From *Romantic Legends of Spain* by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer: English version published by T.Y. Crowell, 1909.

Los blues de la calle Pop (Aventuras de Felipe Malboro, volumen 8)

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher in 1996, published in *European Trash Cinema Special* #1 Jess Franco.

Furia en el trópico

1. Francesco Cesari, in a Facebook post to the author.

2. *ibid.*

3. Another mystery name on the credits, 'Sonia Berco', adds an element of doubt, but since she's the fourth and last woman in the credits I'm inclined to assume that she plays a lesser role, probably Chíncha the brothel madam.

4. The credits of the French version of *El tesoro de la diosa blanca* (*Les Diamants du Kilimandjaro*) and the English-language export version (*Diamonds of Kilimandjaro*) are of no help to us: the only female name amid Eurociné's characteristically skimpy credits is 'Leslie Anderson'.

Revenge in the House of Usher

1. *El País*, 28 March 1983: "Risas ante el terror de El hundimiento de la casa Usher". At https://elpais.com/diario/1983/03/24/cultura/417308413_850215.html

2. From *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe. The full text is available online in various places, including: https://archive.org/stream/Weird_Tales_v34n02_1939-08_AT-sas/Weird_Tales_v34n02_1939-08_AT-sas_djvu.txt

Las chicas del tanga

1. Antonio Mayans, in an interview with the author.

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Carlos Tejeda, published in *Kane3* #11, September-October 2006.

Sola ante el terror

1. *El País*, 28 July 1985, http://elpais.com/diario/1985/07/28/agenda/491349603_850215.html

2. "Monarchs of Minstrelry, from Daddy Rice to date" by E. Le Roy Rice (Kenny Publishing Company).

Una rajita para dos

1. Interview: Chus y Al Pereira, 2002.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

¿Cuanto Cobra un Espía?

1. From an interview with the author conducted in 2010, published in *Murderous Passions*.

Juego sucio en Casablanca

1. Antonio Mayans, interviewed by the author in 2017.

El asesino llevada medias negras

1. Giuliano Gemma interviewed by Lamberto Antonelli in *La Stampa*, 19 July 1985, p.23.

Bangkok, cita con la muerte

1. Juan Soler, interviewed by the author via e-mail.

El ojete de Lulú

1. One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, by Herbert Marcuse, p.60, published by Routledge 1964.

2. *ibid.* p.81.

Entre pitos anda el juego

1. *Filmmax Magazine*.

2. Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol* (Revised and Updated), p.129, published by Marion Boyars, 1991.

3. from Sax Rohmer's *Nude in Mink*, published by Fawcett – Gold Medal Original, 1950. Available online in its entirety at <ftp://121.17.126.74/data1/ts01/english/novel/batch001/201005112107482367.pdf>

4. *ibid.*

Teleporno

1. Antonio Mayans, speaking to the author in Madrid, 2013.

Phollastia

1. Antonio Mayans, speaking to Chus and Al Pereira for the website *Francomania*, interviewed on 19 August 2002.

Dark Mission

1. *El Periódico de Catalunya*, published 1 June 1987.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ABC Madrid*, 13 December 1987.

Esmeralda Bay

1. Robert Forster interviewed by Will Harris for *The A.V. Club*: <https://film.avclub.com/robert-forster-1798227837>

Killer Barbys

1. *La Vanguardia*, 23 June 1994, p.44.

Lust for Frankenstein

1. Saved from http://web.archive.org/web/20071215124042/www.evilread.com/interviews/michelle_bauer.php

2. Brian Horrorwitz, interviewed at the Trash Palace website: <https://www.trashpalace.com/ubangisint.htm>

Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell

1. Pedro Temboury, speaking in the comments section as <https://franconomicon.wordpress.com/2009/05/07/dr-wongs-virtual-hell/>

2. Yorgos Lanthimos, quoted in the article "31 Films Shot on 35mm Released in 2017" at *Filmmaker Magazine's* website: <https://filmmakermagazine.com/105050-31-films-shot-on-35mm-released-in-2017/#.Wsz1NPwbOa>

Vampire Blues

1. The entire text of *Carmilla* is available online at Google Books: <https://books.google.co.uk/>

Red Silk

1. Emilio Schargorodsky, speaking to the author in April 2018.

2. Emilio Schargorodsky speaking to José Luis Salvador Estébanez in 2013 at the website *La Abadía de Berzano*: <https://cerebrin.wordpress.com/2013/04/15/entrevista-a-emilio-schargorodsky-director-de-dracula-0-9/>

3. Exequiel Caldas, speaking to the author in April 2018.

4. *ibid.*

Broken Dolls

1. Exequiel Caldas, speaking to the author in April 2018.

2. Emilio Schargorodsky, speaking to the author in April 2018.

3. Exequiel Caldas, speaking to the author in April 2018.

Blind Target

1. Exequiel Caldas, speaking to the author in April 2018.

2. Kevin Collins interviewed by Darío Lavia for *Cinefania*: <http://www.cinefania.com/terroruniversal/index.php?id=84>

3. Exequiel Caldas, speaking to the author in April 2018.

4. Jess Franco speaking on camera in the documentary film *Antena Criminal* (2002).

5. Brian Horrorwitz interviewed for the Trash Palace website: <https://www.trashpalace.com/ubangisint.htm>

Helter Skelter

1. From *La Nouvelle Justine* by The Marquis De Sade, quoted in the essay "Nature as Destructive Principle" by Pierre Klossowski, included in *The 120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* (Grove Press), p.72.

2. From *The 120 Days of Sodom* by The Marquis De Sade (Grove Press), p.220.

3. From *The 120 Days of Sodom* by The Marquis De Sade (Grove Press), p.173-174.

4. From Sade's *Last Will and Testament*, quoted in the essay "Must We Burn Sade?" by Simone De Beauvoir, included in *The 120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* (Grove Press), p.3.

5. From the essay "Must We Burn Sade?" by Simone De Beauvoir, included in *The 120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* (Grove Press), p.4

6. Quoted by W. Dymess in 'Cas.par David Friedrich: The Aesthetic Expression of Schleiermacher's Romantic Faith,' *Christian Scholar's Review*, 14 (1985).

7. <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/>

[klee-paul/revolving-house-1921-183](https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/)

Vampire Junction

1. Jess Franco interviewed by Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher in 1996, published in *European Trash Cinema Special* #1 Jess Franco.

Incubus

1. Carina Palmer "Makes the most of her "One Shot" at Jess Franco" by Uwe Jordan, published in *Dracula* #42.

Las flores de la pasión

1. Emilio Schargorodsky, speaking to the author in April 2018.

Snakewoman

1. Kevin Collins interviewed by Darío Lavia for *Cinefania*: <http://www.cinefania.com/terroruniversal/index.php?id=84>

2. Jess Franco interviewed by Al Pereira y Chus Nebes on 3 March 2002. Reproduced at the website *La Abadía de Berzano*: <https://cerebrin.wordpress.com/tag/entrevista-a-jesus-franco/>

3. *ibid.*

4. Jess Franco, quoted on the *Sub Rosa* DVD cover to *Snakewoman*.

Paula-Paula

1. Emilio Schargorodsky, speaking to the author in April 2018.

2. *ibid.*

3. Alberto Sedano, in an e-mail to the author in April 2018.

4. *ibid.*

5. *ibid.*

6. *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*

8. "Friedrich Gulda; Eccentric Pianist, Composer" – obituary in the *Los Angeles Times*: <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jan/28/news/mn-58630>

9. Alberto Sedano, in an e-mail to the author in April 2018.

Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies

1. Jess Franco, interviewed by Sean O'Neal for *AV Film*, 2009.

Interview with Antonio Mayans

1. I was hoping to find out the name of Antonio's second film with Jess in 1979 because of a curious gap in the dates. *El escarabajo de oro* was shot in June 1979, in the palmeria at Elche. In December 1979 Franco shot *The Cannibals*, also in the palmeria at Elche, with Mayans playing a tribal chief. The latter date was given to me by Alain Deruelle, who shot a parallel production, *Cannibal Terror*, at the same time and on the same sets as Franco's *The Cannibals*. If Deruelle is correct (and he was pretty certain) then judging by Mayans's recollection there was another Franco film shoot taking place in July 1979, featuring Mayans in the cast, and at the moment there is no obvious candidate among Franco's known films of the period. Perhaps there is an unknown and unfinished film still to be added to the filmography?



THE FLAMINGO CLUB PROUDLY PRESENTS...

JESS FRANCO'S VIDEO PALACIO

RARITIES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF VIDEO, COLLECTED BY FILM ARCHIVIST MARC MORRIS



Left:
MIDNIGHT PARTY as
LA COCCOLONA
Italy

Right:
SHINING SEX
Japan



Left:
DIE SKLAVINNEN as
DIE VERSCHLEPPTEN
Germany
The front cover image is
not from the film.

Right:
DIE MARQUISE VON SADE
as MARQUISE VON SADE
Germany
The front cover image is
not from the film.



Left:
WOMEN BEHIND BARS as
VISA POUR MOURIR
France

Right:
LOVE CAMP as
DIE UNERSÄTTLICHE
Switzerland



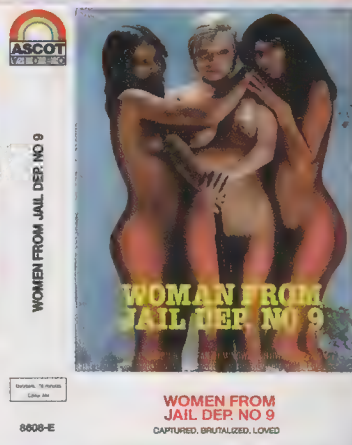
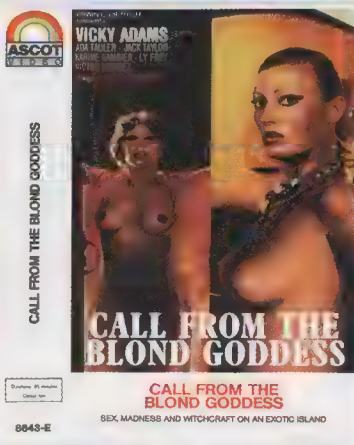
Left:
VOODOO PASSION as
LAS DIOSAS DEL PORN
Spain

Right:
SATANIC SISTERS as
ABERRACIONES
SEXUALES DE UNA
RUBIA CALIENTE
Spain



Left:
VOODOO PASSION as
CALL FROM THE
BLOND GODDESS
Switzerland

Right:
WOMEN IN CELLBLOCK 9
as WOMAN FROM
JAIL DEP. NO 9
Switzerland



Left:
WOMEN IN CELLBLOCK 9
as FLUCHT VON DER
TODESINSEL
Germany
The front cover
features a picture of
Karine Gambier (in a
leather cap) from
Erwin Dietrich's
GEFANGENE FRAUEN
(1980)

Right:
WOMEN IN CELLBLOCK 9
Japan



Left:
THE SADIST OF
NOTRE DAME
as
LE SADIQUE DE
NOTRE-DAME
France

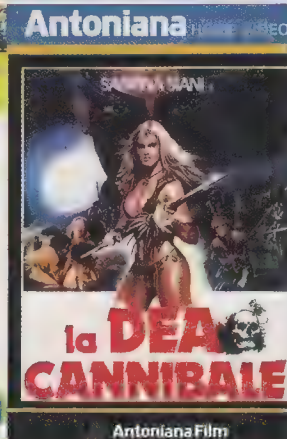
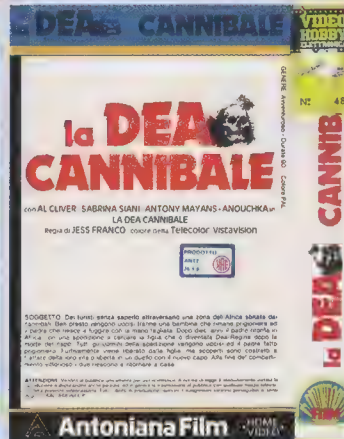
Right:
THE SADIST OF
NOTRE DAME
Japan





Left:
COCKTAIL SPECIAL
as
WIT LIPS
Italy

Right:
ELLES FONT TOUT
as
QUEL CERTO SAPORE
Italy
The front cover image is
not from the film.



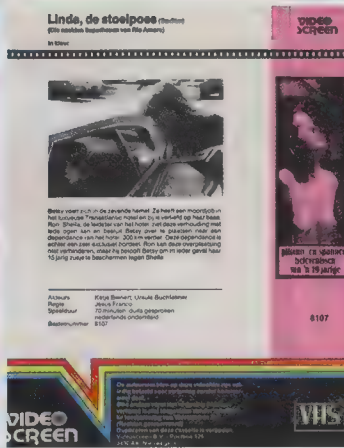
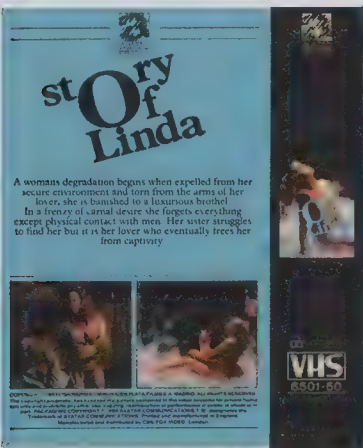
Left:
TWO FEMALE SPIES
WITH FLOWERED
PANTIES
Netherlands

Right:
THE CANNIBALS as
LA DEA CANNIBALE
Italy



Left:
DEVIL HUNTER
UK

Right:
BLOODY MOON as
PROFONDE TENEBRE
Italy

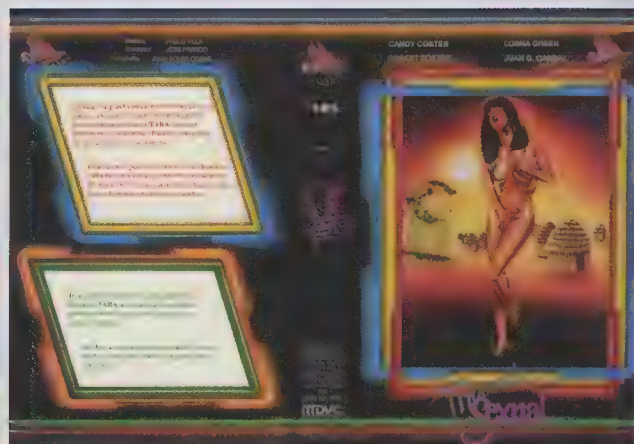


Left:
LINDA as
STORY OF LINDA
UK

Right:
LINDA as
LINDA, DE STOE-POES
Netherlands

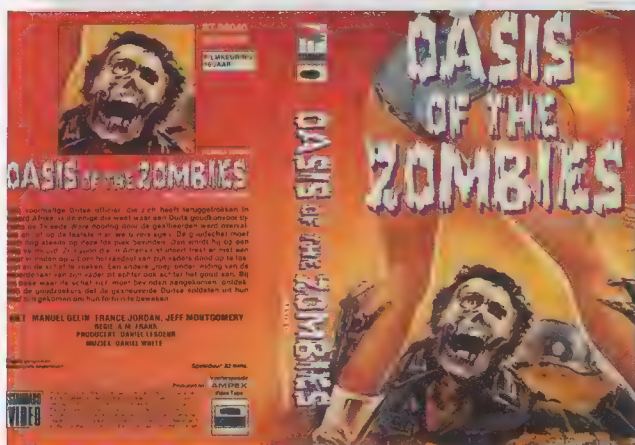
Left:
EUGÉNIE HISTORIA DE
UNA PERVERSIÓN as
EROTISMO
USA (Spanish language)

Right:
MACUMBA SEXUAL
USA (Spanish language)



Left:
OASIS OF THE ZOMBIES
Netherlands

Right:
CONFESIONES ÍNTIMAS
DE UNA EXHIBICIONISTA
Spain



Left:
LOS BLUES DE LA
CALLE POP
Spain

Right:
DIAMONDS OF
KILIMANDJARO
as LES DIAMANTS DU
KILIMANDJARO
France



Left:
NIGHT HAS A
THOUSAND DESIRES
as MIL SEXOS TIENE
LA NOCHE
USA (Spanish language)

Right:
MANSION OF
THE LIVING DEAD
as LA MANSIÓN DE LOS
MUERTOS VIVIENTES
USA (Spanish language)



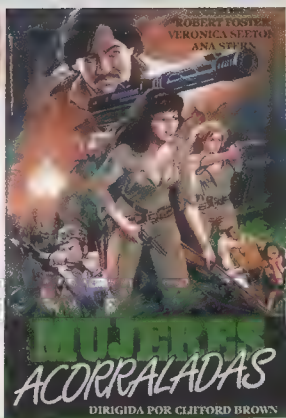
MUJERES ACORRALADAS

Marga, agente de los guerrilleros de un país centroamericano, se enfrenta a un oficial del ejército, para que le ayude a escapar del país si padre Rodrigo, cabecilla guerrillero de la guerrilla cuya cabecera está puesta a precio por sus órdenes. El padre Rodrigo está oculto y muy enfermo.

Cuando Marga está a punto de lograr el objetivo, es detenida por las tropas del gobierno de la región, un sádico que se divierte torturando a las prisioneras. Cuando el oficial enamorado de Marga intenta huir, el escape del país es complicado por una persecución guerrillera que intenta matarlo. Marga se encuentra en una situación desesperada y en cuando hacen planes para escapar del país, esta descubre su verdadera identidad y el oficial del ejército es llamado a conocer al sacerdote Rodrigo. Una situación dura para él que es oficial del ejército, puesto que esa persona es el cabecilla de la guerrilla.

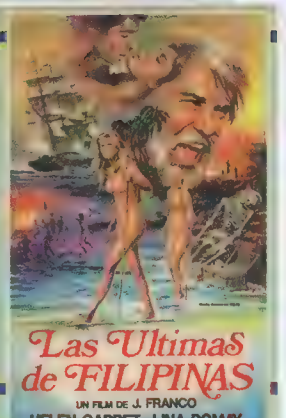


MUJERES ACORRALADAS



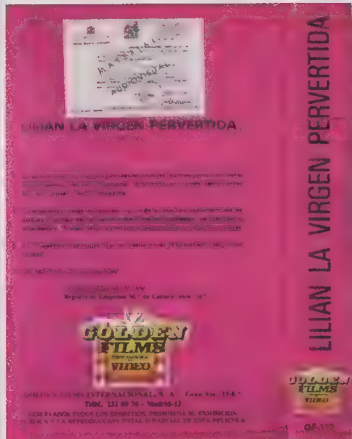
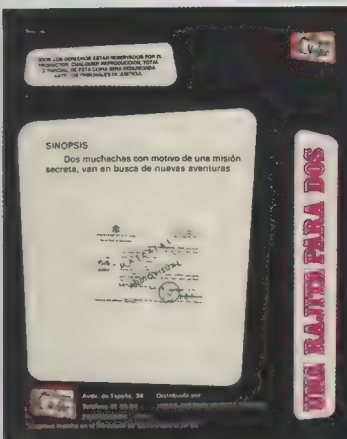
ODIV FAMILIAR

ODIV FAMILIAR



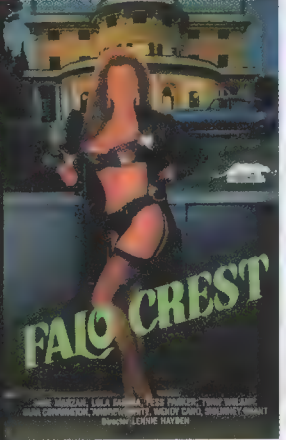
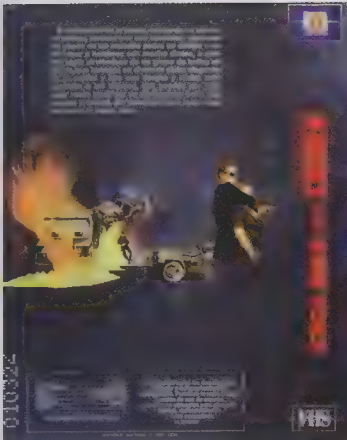
Left:
FURIA EN EL TROPICO as
MUJERES ACORRALADAS
Spain

Right:
LAS ÚLTIMAS DE
FILIPINAS
Spain



Left:
UNA RAJITA PARA DOS
Spain

Right:
LILIAN (LA VIRGEN
PERVERTIDA)
Spain



Left:
ESCLAVAS DEL CRIMEN
Spain

Right:
PHALO CREST as
FALO CREST
Spain



Left:
PHALO CREST as
CHIENNES ET
DOMINATRICES
France

Right:
PHOLLASTIA as
FELLATIONS SAUVAGES
France

JESS FRANCO FILMOGRAPHY

PART ONE

SHORT FILMS

1957	El árbol de España	(director/story/screenplay/music composer)
1958	Pío Baroja	(director)
1959	Las playas vacías	(director/story/screenplay)
1959	Oro español	(director/story/screenplay/music composer)
1960	Estampas guipuzcoanas número 2: Pío Baroja	(director)
1960	El destierro del Cid	(director)

WORK FOR OTHER DIRECTORS

1953	La Môme vert de gris (d Bernard Borderie) as Cita con la muerte	(Spanish dubbing supervisor)
1954	Cómicos (d Juan Antonio Bardem)	(music composer/assistant director)
1954	Felices pascuas (d Juan Antonio Bardem)	(assistant director)
1954	El coyote (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(story/screenplay/assistant director)
1954	Educando a papá (d Fernando Soler)	(assistant director)
1955	Nosotros dos / We Two (d Emilio Fernández)	(assistant producer/assistant director – both uncredited)
1955	Muerte de un ciclista / Death of a Cyclist (d Juan Antonio Bardem)	(uncredited 2nd assistant director)
1955	Señora ama (d Julio Bracho)	(assistant producer/assistant director – both uncredited)
1955	La justicia del Coyote (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(co-screenplay/assistant director)
1956	Miedo (d León Klimovsky)	(co-screenplay/assistant director/actor)
1956	Viaje de novios (d León Klimovsky)	(assistant director)
1956	Fulano y Mengano (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(writer/ uncredited assistant director)
1956	Historias de Madrid (d Ramón Comas)	(music composer/assistant director)
1956	El expreso de Andalucía (d Francisco Rovira Beleta)	(music composer – uncredited)
1957	Los jueves, milagro (d Luis G. Berlanga)	(assistant director)
1957	El hombre que viajaba despacito (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(music composer/assistant director)
1957	El maestro (d Aldo Fabrizi) aka Il maestro	(additional music – uncredited)
1958	Ana dice sí (d Pedro Lazaga)	(production manager/actor – uncredited)
1958	Un hecho violento (d José María Forqué)	(music composer)
1958	Luna de verano (d Fernando Fernán Gómez)	(co-screenplay/production manager)
1959	Llegaron los franceses (d León Klimovsky)	(writer, song-writer)
1960	Ama Rosa (d León Klimovsky)	(co-screenplay)
1962	La venganza del Zorro (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(story /screenplay)
1964	El extraño viaje / Strange Voyage (d Fernando Fernán Gómez)	(actor, as Venancio Vidal)
1964	Treasure Island (d Orson Welles)	(assistant director)
1964-65	Chimes at Midnight (d Orson Welles)	(2nd unit director)
1965	Misión Lisboa (d Tulio Demicheli)	(writer, as 'David Khunne')
1969	Cuadrilátero (d Eloy de la Iglesia)	(music composer)
1978	Poseida (d Giulio Petroni)	(music composer)
1985	L'Ange de la mort (d Andrea Bianchi)	(co-writer, as 'D. Khunn')
1987	Biba la banda (d Ricardo Palacios)	(executive producer/2nd unit director)
1987	Esa cosa con plumas (d Oscar Ladoire)	(actor)
1992	Don Quijote de Orson Welles (d Orson Welles)	(assistant director, editing director, dialogue writer)

PROBLEMÁTICA

1956	La melodía misteriosa (d Juan Fortuny)	(writer as 'A.L. Marieux' – actually Marius Lesoeur)
1963	55 Days at Peking (d Nicolas Ray)	(unit assistant)
1956	Around the World in Eighty Days (d Michael Todd)	(actor-extra – uncredited)

JESUS FRANCO FILMOGRAPHY

PART TWO

FEATURE FILMS

Release dates indicate theatrical bookings and do not include festival or trade screenings. Alternative titles are limited here to theatrical releases in the country or countries of origin, along with any English-language theatrical titles. Where there is space, relevant English-language DVD or Blu-ray titles are included. Some alternative theatrical titles have been dropped for reasons of space; a full list can be found at the head of the appropriate reviews. Where films were released theatrically in variant editions, these variants are listed in italics. For the purposes of this filmography I consider a variant edition to be one which adds substantial new material; where a film was shot in both a 'clothed' and 'nude' version, as was the case in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* for example, this is simply noted in the key column, as the narrative is the same in both cases. Versions which are shorter due to censorship are not included. Unfinished films are not given numbers in the sequence, but they are included in the list with the prefix UF to indicate where they belong.

† - with additional scenes filmed by Franco
‡ - with additional scenes not filmed by Franco
* - with significantly different editing
§ - nude and clothed versions filmed at same time
? - release date unknown.
¥ - hardcore project from conception
Δ - includes additional hardcore filmed by Franco
- includes hardcore inserts not filmed by Franco
√ - released on video only
≠ - unfinished
∅ - finished but unreleased in any form

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
1.	1959	1961	Tenemos 18 años
2.	1960	1963	Labios rojos
3.	1960	1960	La reina del Tabarín
	1960	1961	* † <i>Mariquita La Belle de Tabarín</i>
4.	1960	1961	Vampiresas 1930 (Volando hacia la fama) aka Certains les préfèrent noires
5.	1961	1962	Gritos en la noche
		1964	† <i>L'Horrible Docteur Orlof aka The Awful Dr. Orlof aka The Demon Doctor</i>
6.	1962	1964	La muerte silba un blues aka Agent 077 Opération "Jamaïque"
		1966	† <i>Agent 077 Opération Sexy</i>
7.	1962	1964	§ La mano de un hombre muerto
		1967	* <i>Le Sadique baron von Klaus aka Le Sadique aka The Sadistic Baron von Klaus</i>
8.	1963	1964	Rifi en la ciudad (Vous souvenez vous de Paco?)
9.	1963	1964	El Llanero aka Le Jaguar
10.	1964	1965	El secreto del doctor Orloff aka Dr. Orloff's Monster
		1965	† <i>Les Maîtresses du docteur Jekyll aka Dr. Jekyll's Mistresses</i>
11.	1965	1966	Miss Muerte aka The Diabolical Dr. Z
12.	1965	1966	Cartas boca arriba aka Cartes sur tables aka Attack of the Robots
13.	1966	1968	Residencia para espías aka Golden Horn
14.	1966	1967	Lucky el intrépido aka Agente Speciale L.K. (Operazione Re Mida) aka Lucky the Inscrutable
15.	1967	1968	Necronomicon aka Succubus
		1971	<i>Delirium</i>
16.	1967	1968	El caso de las dos bellezas aka Rote Lippen Sadisterotica aka Two Undercover Angels aka Sadisterotica
17.	1967	1969	Küss mich Monster aka Kiss Me Monster
		1970	* † <i>Bésame monstruo</i>
18.	1967	1968	The Blood of Fu Manchu aka Fu Manchú y el beso de la muerte aka Kiss and Kill aka Der Todeskuss des Dr. Fu Man Chu
19.	1968	?	The Girl from Rio aka Future Women aka Mothers of America
		1969	† <i>Die Sieben Männer der Sumuru aka La ciudad sin nombres</i>
20.	1968	1969	99 Women
		1969	† <i>99 mujeres</i>
		1974	† # <i>Les Brûlantes</i>
21.	1968	1969	Justine aka Marquis de Sade: Justine aka Justine ovvero Le disavventure della virtù aka Justine and Juliet
22.	1968	1969	The Castle of Fu Manchu aka El castillo de Fu-Manchu aka Die Folterkammer des Dr. Fu Man Chu
23.	1968	1970	Venus in Furs
		1969	* † <i>Paroxismus ...può una morta rivivere per amore?...</i>
24.	1969	1970	Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion aka Wildkatzen aka Philosophy in the Boudoir
25.	1969	?	Sex Charade
26.	1969	1970	The Bloody Judge aka Der Hexentöter von Blackmoor aka Il trono di fuoco aka Night of the Blood Monster
		1971	† <i>El proceso de las brujas</i>
27.	1969	1973	Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit aka Nightmares Come at Night
28.	1969	1970	Count Dracula aka El conde Drácula aka Il conte Dracula aka Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
29.	1970	1974	Eugenie aka Eugenie de Sade aka Eugenia
30.	1970	1971	Vampyros Lesbos Erbin des Dracula aka Vampyros Lesbos
		1974	* † <i>Las vampiras</i>
31.	1970	1971	Sie Tötete in Ekstase aka She Killed in Ecstasy
uf1	1970		≠ Juliette
32.	1970	1971	Der Teufel Kam aus Akasawa aka El diablo que vino de Akasawa aka The Devil Came from Akasava
33.	1970	1971	X 312 Flug zur Hölle aka Vuelo al infierno aka X312 – Flight to Hell
34.	1971	1972	El muerto hace las maletas aka Der Todesrächer von Soho
35.	1971	1974	La venganza del doctor Mabuse
		1972	* † <i>Dr. M schlägt Zu</i>
36.	1971	1972	Jungfrauen-Report
37.	1971	1972	Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen aka Trois filles nues sur l'île de Robinson aka Sexy Darlings
38.	1971		La Nuit de l'étoiles filantes
		1973	<i>Une vierge chez les morts vivants [version 1]</i>
		1973	* <i>Christina, princesse de l'erotisme</i> aka <i>I desideri erotici di Christine</i>
		1981	‡ <i>Une vierge chez les morts vivants [version 2]</i> aka <i>AVirgin among the Living Dead</i>
39.	1971	1972	§ Dracula prisonnier de Frankenstein aka Dracula contra Frankenstein aka Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein
40.	1972	1972	A filha de Dracula aka La fille de Dracula aka Dracula's Daughter
41.	1972	1975	Los amantes de la isla del Diablo aka Devil's Island Lovers
		1974	* † <i>Quartiers des femmes</i>
42.	1972	1973	§ La maldición de Frankenstein aka La malédiction de Frankenstein aka The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein
43.	1972	1973	Les Demons aka Os Demonios aka The Demons
44.	1972	1973	Un capitán de quince años aka Un capitaine de quinze ans
45.	1972	1976	Un silencio de tumba
46.	1972	1973	Les Ébranlées
47.	1972	1973	Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane aka Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac
uf2	1972		≠ Relax Baby
uf3	1972		≠ El misterio del castillo rojo
48.	1973	1978	Los ojos del doctor Orloff aka The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff
49.	1973	1974	Plaisir à trois aka How to Seduce a Virgin
50.	1973		La comtesse perverse aka Countess Perverse
		1974	† <i>Les Croqueuses [version 1]</i>
		1974	† Δ <i>Les Croqueuses [version 2]</i>
		1980	† Δ# <i>Sexy Nature</i>
51.	1973	1974	Maciste contre la reine des Amazones aka The Lustful Amazon
52.	1973		≠ Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide
		1975	† <i>Les Gloutonnes</i>
53.	1973	1976	Al otro lado del espejo
		1975	* † <i>Le Miroir obscène</i>
		1981	* † # <i>Lo specchio del piacere</i>
54.	1973	?	§ La comtesse noire aka Female Vampire aka Femmes Vampires aka Vampier Vrouwen
		1975	Δ <i>Les Avaleuses</i> aka <i>Lüsterne Vampire im Spermarausch</i>
		?	† <i>La Comtesse aux seins nus</i> aka <i>Erotikill</i> aka <i>The Bare Breasted Countess</i>
55.	1973	1976	La noche de los asesinos aka Night of the Skull aka Night of the Assassins
uf4	1973		≠ La casa del ahorcado
56.	1973	1974	Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda aka The Hot Nights of Linda
		1975	† <i>Mais qui donc a violé Linda?</i> aka <i>La felicità nel peccato</i> aka <i>Erotic Dreams</i>
57.	1973	1979	Des frissons sur la peau aka Des frissons sous la peau
		?	† <i>Tender and Perverse Emanuelle</i>
		?	Δ <i>[Hardcore variant; title unknown]</i>
58.	1973	1977	Embrasse moi aka La calda bestia aka Kiss Me Killer
uf5	1973		≠ Lascivia aka Lasvive
59.	1974	1975	§ Exorcismes et Messes noires aka Exorcisme aka Exorcism
		1975	<i>Demoniac [1]</i>
		1975	Δ <i>Sexorcismes</i>
60.	1974	1974	Célestine... bonne à tout faire aka Célestine Maid at Your Service aka Célestine, An All Round Maid
61.	1974	1974	Lorna... l'exorciste aka Les Possédées du diable (Lorna, l'exorciste) aka Linda aka Lorna... the Exorcist
62.	1974	1975	Les Chatouilleuses
		1982	# <i>Le sexy goditrici</i>
63.	1974		ø L'Homme le plus sexy du monde

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
	1974	1974	* <i>Le Jouisseur</i>
64.	1974	1975	Les Grandes Emmerdeuses
65.	1975	1976	Julietta 69
		1979	* ‡ <i>Justine</i>
66.	1975	1977	Midnight Party aka Heisse Berührungen aka Lady Porno
67.	1975	1977	Shining Sex aka Shining Sex la fille au sexe brillant aka Het meisje met de glanzende sex
68.	1975	1976	Frauengefängnis aka Barbed Wire Dolls aka Caged Women
69.	1975	?	Diamants pour l'enfer aka Les flagellées de la cellule 69 aka Women Behind Bars
	?	?	<i>Le Fouet</i>
70.	1975	1978	Downtown aka Die Nackten Puppen der Unterwelt (Downtown)
71.	1975	1977	Die Sklavinnen
72.	1975	1977	¥ Die Marquise von Sade aka Doriana Gray
		?	‡ <i>Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray</i> (softcore version of <i>Die Marquise von Sade</i>)
73.	1975/6		ø Mandinga
uf6	1975		¥ L'assassin portait des bas noirs
74.	1976	1976	Mädchen im Nachtverkehr aka Heißer Sex im Nachtverkehr aka Girls in the Night Traffic
		?	Δ * <i>Wilde Lust</i> (hardcore version of <i>Mädchen im Nachtverkehr</i>)
75.	1976	1977	Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel (softcore version)
	1976	1977	Δ <i>Weisse Haut und schwarze Schenkel</i> (hardcore version)
76.	1976	1977	In 80 Betten um die Welt aka Mondo Erotico
77.	1976	1976	Jack the Ripper Der Dirnenmörder von London aka Jack the Ripper
78.	1976	1977	Greta – Haus ohne Männer aka Ilsa the Wicked Warden aka Wanda the Wicked Warden
79.	1976	1977	Die Liebesbriefe einer Portugiesischen Nonne aka Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun
80.	1977	1977	Das Frauenhaus aka Blue Rita – le cabaret des filles perverses aka Le cabaret des filles perverses
		?	# <i>Blue Rita</i>
81.	1977	1977	Die Teuflischen Schwestern aka Satanic Sisters aka Sexy Sisters aka Swedish Nympho Slaves
82.	1977	1977	Frauen im Liebeslager aka Love Camp
83.	1977	1977	Der Ruf der Blonden Göttin aka Voodoo Passion
84.	1977	1978	Frauen ohne Unschuld aka Wicked Women
85.	1977	1978	Frauen für Zellen-Block 9 aka Women in Cellblock 9
86.	1978	1978	Cocktail spécial
87.	1978	1979	Elles font tout
88.	1978	1979	Je brûle de partout
89.	1978	1980	" Ópalo de fuego (mercaderes del sexo)
		1980	* ‡ <i>Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur aka Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties</i>
90.	1979	1981	Las chicas de Copacabana aka Les filles de Copacabana aka The Girls of the Copacabana
91.	1979	1980	Sinfonia erótica
92.	1979	1981	* ‡ El sadico de Notre Dame aka The Sadist of Notre Dame (based on footage drawn from <i>Exorcism</i>)
93.	1979		ø El escarabajo de oro aka Vaya luna de miel
94.	1980	1981	La déesse des barbares aka Mondo Cannibale 3. Teil Die blonde Göttin der Kannibalen aka The Cannibals
95.	1981	1982	El sexo está loco
96.	1980	1981	Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada
		1983	‡ <i>Cecilia aka Cécilia fille de feu</i>
97.	1980	1981	Eugénie Historia de una perversion aka Erotismo
98.	1980	1980	El canibal aka Jungfrau unter Kannibalen aka Sexo canibal aka Devil Hunter
99.	1980	1981	Sadomania – Hölle der Lust aka Sadomania (El infierno de la pasión) aka Sadomania
100.	1980	1981	Die Säge Des Todes aka Bloody Moon
101.	1980	1981	Die Nackten Superhexen vom Rio Amore aka Orgia de ninfómanas aka Linda aka The Story of Linda
102.	1981	1981	La chica de las bragas transparentes aka Pick-Up Girls
uf7	1981		¥ Adolescencia
103.	1981	1982	El lago de las virgenes aka La isla de las virgenes
104.	1981	1982	Macumba Sexual
105.	1981	1982	La noche de los sexos abiertos
106.	1981	1982	L'abime des morts-vivants aka The Oasis of the Living Dead
		1983	* ‡ <i>La tumba de los muertos vivientes</i>
107.	1981	1983	Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista
108.	1982	1982	Botas negras, látigo de cuero
109.	1982	1984	El siniestro Dr. Orloff
110.	1982	1983	La casa de las mujeres perdidas aka Perversion en la isla perdida
111.	1982	1982	Las orgías inconfesables de Emmanuelle aka The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
112.	1982	1983	El hotel de los ligues
113.	1982	1983	La mansión de los muertos vivientes aka Mansion of the Living Dead
114.	1982	✓	La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong
115.	1982	1983	Gemidos de placer
116.	1982	✓	Los blues de la calle Pop (Aventuras de Felipe Malboro, volumen 8)
117.	1983	✓	Furia en el trópico
		1986	Δ <i>Orgasmo Perverso</i>
		✓ †	<i>Mujeres acorraladas (1986)</i>
118.	1983	ø	El hundimiento de la casa Usher
		1984	<i>Los crímenes de Usher</i>
		1988	* † <i>Névrose aka Neurosis aka Revenge in the House of Usher</i>
119.	1983	1983	El tesoro de la diosa blanca
		1988	* † <i>Les diamants du Kilimandjaro aka Diamonds of Kilimandjaro</i>
120.	1982	1984	Δ * Lilian (la virgen pervertida)
	1982	ø	<i>Lilian (la virgen pervertida) (original 'S' cert version)</i>
121.	1983	1983	Mil sexos tiene la noche
122.	1983/4	1985	Δ Un pito para tres
123.	1983	1983	Historia sexual de O aka The Sexual Story of 'O'
124.	1983	ø	Barrio Chino
	1983	Δ ø	<i>Barrio porno</i>
125.	1983	1985	En busca del dragón dorado
uf8	1983	≠	Tundra y el templo del sol
126	1983/5	1990	‡ Golden Temple Amazons (version of <i>Tundra y el templo del sol</i> finished by Alain Payet)
127.	1983	ø	El abuelo, la condesa y escarlata la traviesa
128.	1983	1983	Camino solitario
129.	1983	1985	Las chicas del tanga
130.	1983	1986	Sola ante el terror
131.	1983	1986	Sangre en mis zapatos
132.	1983	1984	¥ Una rajita para dos
133.	1984	1984	¿Cuánto Cobra un espía?
134.	1984	1985	Juego sucio en Casablanca aka Sale jeu a Casablanca
uf9	1984	≠	El asesino llevada medias negras
135.	1984	✓	La chica de los labios rojos
136.	1984	- ✓	Bahia blanca
137.	1984	ø	Voces de muerte
138.	1985	✓	Las últimas de Filipinas
139.	1985	1987	Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido
140.	1985	✓	Bangkok, cita con la muerte
uf10	1984	≠	Gentes del río
	1986	≠	<i>El hombre que mató a Mengele</i>
	1994	≠	<i>Il faut tuer Klaus</i>
141	1985	ø	Una de chinos
142.	1985	✓	La esclava blanca
143.	1985	ø	La venganza del rinoceronte blanco aka La venganza del reinoceronte blanco
144.	1985	1985	¥ El ojete de Lulú
145.	1985	1985	¥ El chupete de Lulú
146.	1985	1985	¥ Entre pitos anda el juego
147.	1985	1986	¥ El mirón y la exhibicionista
148.	1985	1986	¥ Las chuponas
149.	1986	1986	¥ Para las nenas... leche calentita
150.	1986	✓	Esclavas del crimen
151.	1986	ø	Teleporno
uf11	1986	≠	Bragueta Story
152.	1986	ø	Las tribulaciones de un Buda bizco aka Las tribulaciones de un Buda vizco
153.	1986	ø	S.I.D.A. La peste del siglo veinte
154.	1987	1987	¥ Phollastia
155.	1987	1987	¥ Phalo Crest
156.	1987	1988	Dark Mission (Les fleurs du mal) aka Dark Mission (Operación Cocaína) aka Dark Mission, Flowers of Evil
157.	1987	1988	Les prédateurs de la nuit aka Faceless
158.	1989	?	Esmeralda Bay aka La bahia esmeralda

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
159.	1989	✓	La chute des aigles aka Fall of the Eagles
160.	1990	✓	Downtown Heat (ciudad baja) aka Downtown Heat
161.	1993	ø	Jungle of Fear
162.	1996	1996	Killer Barbys aka Vampire Killer Barbys
163.	1997	✓	Tender Flesh aka Carne fresca
164.	1998	✓	Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula aka Eight Legs to Love You
165.	1998	✓	Lust for Frankenstein
166.	1998	✓	Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell aka El infierno virtual del Dr. Wong
167.	1998	✓	Vampire Blues aka Los blues del vampiro
168.	1999	✓	Red Silk aka Seda roja
169.	1999	✓	Broken Dolls aka Muñecas rotas
170.	2000	✓	Blind Target aka Obietivo a ciégas
171.	2000	✓	Helter Skelter
172.	2001	✓	Vampire Junction
173.	2002	✓	Incubus
174.	2002	✓	Killer Barbys vs. Dracula
175.	2002	✓	Las flores de la pasión aka Jess Franco's Passion
176.	2002	✓	Flores de perversion aka Jess Franco's Perversion
177.	2005	✓	Snakewoman
178.	2007/8	2008	La cripta de las mujeres malditas aka A Bad Day at the Cemetery
	2012	✓	<i>La cripta de las condenadas</i> aka <i>Crypt of the Condemned</i>
	2012	✓	<i>La cripta de las condenadas 2</i> aka <i>Crypt of the Condemned 2</i>
179.	2009	✓	Paula-Paula
180.	2012	✓	Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies
181.	2012/13	✓	Revenge of the Alligator Ladies

GROUP 2: INSTANCES OF JESS FRANCO STEPPING IN TO HELP DIRECT SOMEONE ELSE'S FILM

1967	Eve aka Eva en la selva – dir: Jeremy Summers
1973	La marque de Zorro – dir: 'James Gardner' [i.e. Marius Lesoeur and Alain Payet]
1974	Une vierge pour St.-Tropez – dir: Georges Friedland
1975	Razzia sur le plaisir aka Une cage dorée – dir: Marius Lesoeur [as 'A.M. Frank']
1980	Kalt wie Eis – dir: Carl Schenkel

GROUP 3: FILMS NOT DIRECTED BY FRANCO WHICH USE FOOTAGE FROM HIS WORK

1980	Les Gardiennes du pénitencier aka Un paradis pour des brutes, un enfer pour des femmes aka Jailhouse Wardress dir: Alain Deruelle [inc. footage from Franco's <i>Frauengefängnis</i> , Alain Payet's <i>Train spécial pour SS</i> and Patrice Rhomm's <i>Elsa Fräulein SS</i>]
1981	Lola 2000 [inc. footage from <i>Cocktail spécial</i> and <i>Elles font tout</i> + Alain Payet's <i>Furies sexuelles</i> and <i>Prostitution clandestine</i>]
1983	Claire [inc. footage from <i>Elles font tout</i> , <i>Cocktail spécial</i> and <i>Je brûle de partout</i> + Joe D'Amato's <i>Le ereditiere superporno</i>]

GROUP 4: DISPUTED TITLES

1991	À la poursuite de Barbara [dir: Jean Rollin]
1978	Convoi de filles aka A l'Est de Berlin [dir: Pierre Chevalier] There is no evidence that Franco worked on this film; it does however include some of the same war footage Franco used in <i>Oasis of the Zombies</i> (culled from Alfredo Rizzo's <i>I giardini del diavolo</i>).

GROUP 0: UNMADE PROJECTS

The following 'Jess Franco films' exist only as ghosts. Those marked * are drawn from the contents of a suitcase recovered from the South of France by Erwin Dietrich in 1975, kindly made available to me by Roman Güttinger and Uwe Huber. The materials vary from typed synopses to hand-drawn poster art, from eight page hand-written story treatments to personal correspondence and ephemera.

Los colgados	Dracula Junior*	La Porte du brouillard*
Dynamite South*	Yacula*	Redes
Ectasse Island*	Dunia, la novia eterna*	Tarzana*
El extraño huesped	Blue Medea*	
Black Nana	Los desesperados*	
Las brujas de Zaragoza	Pace a mezzanotte*	
Concert en sex majeur*	Las hermanas de la cruz*	

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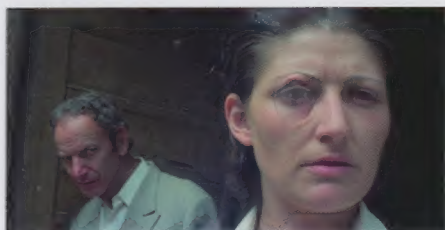
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Jesús Franco (aka Jess Franco) is an iconic figure in world cinema. For devotees of the weird and sado-erotic he was a cinematic magician, creating unique and disturbing dream-worlds on the cheapest of budgets. A passionate believer in artistic and sexual freedom, he constantly pushed at the boundaries of censorship during an extraordinary career spanning seven decades. Franco's delirious spontaneity turned the basics of popular cinema – sex and violence – into an avant-garde whirl of sensations. Films like *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Shining Sex* and *Gemidos de placer* throw out the rulebook and reinvent genre cinema, while even his weakest efforts exude something strange and wild amid the chaos. Meanwhile, multiple variants of his films, made for different countries, turn the Franco experience into a dizzying hall of mirrors, entrancing for the aficionado but confusing for beginners – until now.

Stephen Thrower has devoted ten years to examining each and every Jess Franco film, and with this book – the second in a two-volume set that began with *Murderous Passions* in 2015 – he delves into Franco's career from 1975 to 2013, shining a light into the darkest corners of the Franco filmography, reappraising every film and uncovering previously unknown information. Unparalleled in scope and ambition, as obsessive as its subject, *Flowers of Perversion* provides the definitive assessment of Jess Franco's labyrinthine film universe.

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